Toward professional learning experiences for teachers that are meaning-full: A narrative study

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Abstract

This doctoral portfolio is a set of interconnected research studies that examine the nature of significant professional learning experiences for teachers, postgraduate university students, and teacher educators.

The portfolio begins with a study of classroom learning as it is for many young people. Secondary school students are asked to draw their understanding of learning; however, the natural response for most is to draw learning as they experience it in school. The emerging metaphors are examined indicating that many young people have constrained, mechanical and disturbing notions of learning at school. What are the implications of this for teachers and their learning? It is suggested that unless teachers' learning is deepened through empowering professional learning experiences, student learning will continue to be compromised.

The first key research project is a study of teachers working in an Australian secondary school who learn within collaborative learning partnerships. A group of these teachers use metaphor to help them to capture how their personal learning develops over two years. What emerges is the relational nature of deep learning. Teachers learn through complex social processes that work in paradoxical ways to create harmony, dissonance and insight.

The second study focuses on the learning experience of a Master of Education student who engages in a negotiated study. The experience is described by the postgraduate student and three other educators who were involved in a public forum that took place at the culmination of the unit as an assessment task. Learning develops for all as a complex network of associations that embed, extend and take surprising turns.

The final study is focused on the researcher's own learning as she engages in a professional learning seminar for teacher educators. The nature of reflective thinking is examined as well as the difficult, frustrating nature of learning that challenges one's firmly held beliefs and values.

This doctorate is a narrative study that is largely autoethnographic and aims to extend the boundaries of how we write about educational research.

Statement of Authorship

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the portfolio, this portfolio contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis/portfolio by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and bibliography of the portfolio.

Signed:
Dated:

Amanda McGraw
Candidate

Signed:
Dated:
Professor John Smyth
Principal Supervisor

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the inspiration I have gained through conversations with a series of esteemed supervisors who through their openness and good will helped me to see and explore the possibilities. I began this work with Associate Professor Helen Hayes who passed away. Helen's quiet capacity to listen deeply enabled me to begin the journey in an exploratory way. There is no set formula she insisted; I should find my own path. Helen's voice and a collection of her books urged me on as I worked for some time on my own. Her quiet, tentative thoughtfulness is there in my doctorate. I hear it.

Another influential supervisor was Doctor Peter Swan. Peter's narrative approach to research inspired me to take up my own storyteller's voice, a voice that lay dormant for some time after I made the decision to teach and not write. Peter helped me to understand how my writer's voice could help me to know my teaching and learning more deeply.

I watch my third influential supervisor, Professor John Smyth, with admiration. His gutsy determination to make a difference to education for young people has helped me to understand the political dimensions of my work and to strengthen my desire to engage in research that is authentic, critical and embedded in the real lives of teachers and students.

I would also like to acknowledge my wonderful family (Stephen, Polly and Colleen) who surround me with love and good humour and my good friend Mary whose ongoing dialogue about education I could not do without.

Dedication

For my father who taught me to gaze beyond the stars.

Table of Contents

Prologue

On beauty

I wanted to make something beautiful. As a teacher in secondary schools I often wondered about the place of beauty in education. Traditionally we have expected young people to learn in the worst possible architectural spaces and there is little if any direct mention of the concept of beauty in the curriculum. Yet in classrooms of all sorts, in all places in the world, the most beautiful things happen. I made a decision early in the piece: if I was going to write about learning (teachers' learning, students' learning, and my own learning); then the text would need to reflect in its construction, what is beautiful about that process. It would need to illuminate struggle and connection in ways that bring together the broad, wide view with small, close moments. What you will find in this text are multiple levels that work to illuminate connectedness and complexity. The chapters are substantive layers that rub up against one another and within the chapters there are episodic interruptions that enable the text to travel backwards and forwards in time. Between the chapters you will find small storied slices: pictures and words that work to fill these spaces and create continuity. The stories contained in these slices of time are heartfelt and honest; they are creative gestures that speak through words and marks that are composed, considered and reconstructed over time. I want this text to be alive with spontaneous moments, heartfelt concern and language that is woven from a writer's perspective.

Context

Learning is always shaped by contextual factors. Each chapter is launched through situated experiences, places where thinking and learning occur and where I begin to re-imagine possibilities. The places are mostly professional contexts (meeting rooms, libraries, conference spaces, offices, laboratories) where teachers meet formally and informally to talk about their work. But there are other places too: art galleries, the Australian bush, the lake where I walk each morning, a local

winery, where thinking about my profession also occurs. These places not only situate the learning but influence it. The context is an active component.

People

Constructing this text has been a social experience. I read somewhere that the thing about leaders is that they are in charge but not in control. As writer/researcher I take charge of projects, ideas, processes; but essentially I am not in control. Every notion included here has been developed through a connection to others. People I know well—my professional colleagues, family and friends; and people who I have never met—researchers, writers, artists, have helped me to think and learn and share ideas. Ideas are spawned and developed in conversations that are both real and imagined. Responsibilities are taken seriously because we care about people. New possibilities are considered when people support one another to take risks and listen attentively. Being surrounded by great people has made my learning journey rich and so enjoyable.

Chapter One

Beauty, Sedimentation and Connectedness in Anxious Times

Brice Marden

Skull with Thought (1993-95)

Oil on linen

180.3 x 144.8 cm

(Permission has been gained to include this painting. See Appendix 3.)

> To take a stranger's vantage point on everyday reality is to look inquiringly and wonderingly on the world in which one lives. It is like returning home from a long stay in some other place. The homecomer notices details and patterns in his environment he never saw before. He finds that he has to think about local rituals and customs to make sense of them once more (Greene, 1973, p. 268).

Context: Brice Marden retrospective, Museum of Modern Art, New York (November, 2006)

I am a stranger but returning to the Museum of Modern Art in New York is strangely like coming home (Greene, 1973). We stand quietly, calmly, a lengthening queue of people from all over the world, waiting for the museum to open. The dim winter light makes everything close and intimate: objects, road, taxi, walls, art and people. We stand in line and no one flusters or complains. We know and accept the ritual. There is a shared understanding here that you arrive early and wait. In these still, free moments I meet the eyes of strangers and share a fleeting moment's connection. I see the edge of a well loved book peeking from the corner of a black bag; a floral sleeve delicately folded; a child gently stroking the material in her mother's skirt; newly applied red lipstick on a pale face. We wait and watch ourselves watching. We begin to remove layers of cloth like skin: scarves, hats, woollen overcoats. We move surreptitiously into new environments and make them our own by filling the space with ourselves, our belongings, our smell. As we wait our eyes linger in the textures of fabric, we find shape and pattern in the architecture and play with familiar words on printed signs. Here in the art gallery we are warned against hasty watching, of being too quick to judge, too keen to find solutions. Here we are likely to be

surprised, to have the air knocked out of us by bold new ideas; or by the subtle crooked threads emerging from something ancient.

In contrast, two days earlier I waited in a queue at Los Angeles Airport. At three in the morning, sleep deprived and restless, hundreds of people waited to be searched. In frustration we shifted our weighty bodies from one foot to the next while some of us draped ourselves lifelessly on the metal trolleys that transported bulging bags. No one spoke. In our eagerness to move on, we avoided one another and protectively grasped our precious possessions and newly acquired treasures. One by one we stubbornly removed our shoes and stood with arms raised, legs apart as mechanical devices scanned every surface of our bodies; probing, searching for something irregular, something feared. Men in navy uniforms operated with the authority of newly devised rules and proceeded through the motions of checking, prodding and prescribing. In anxious times, in certain contexts, we fear strange objects and work to control, manipulate and manage the unpredictable.

In the Museum of Modern Art I feel simultaneously safe and strange, familiar and curious. When we take the time to really examine an art work, we search for meaning and wonder; we turn our heads this way and that, we stand back and move close, we scratch our heads and bite the corners of our mouths, we take time to ponder the possibilities and connections. We feel uncertain, ignorant and challenged by the unfamiliar. The virtue of not knowing (Duckworth, 2006) requires us to search for possible answers, take risks and stretch our thoughts. Duckworth contends that knowing the right answer is “over rated” (2006, p. 63)

because the power of learning lies more in the figuring out. She writes: "Knowing the right answer requires no decisions, carries no risks, and makes no demands. It is automatic. It is thoughtless" (2006, p.63).

Here in the Museum of Modern Art I begin to make unusual connections between the artwork and my ongoing preoccupation with thinking and learning processes. Excitedly, I start to see visual representations of what I am trying to capture in words. In this state of wonderment and awe (Costa & Kallick, 2000) I welcome surprise, puzzlement, patience and contemplation as dispositions that enable me to think and learn well.

I am here to see the Brice Marden retrospective. Garrels (2006), who has organised the exhibition, writes that Marden "has sustained exceptional intensity and continuous invention in his art for more than forty years" (p. 11). Marden's work is deeply influenced by the people he has known, the places he has visited, the cultures he has immersed himself in, and the history of art itself (Garrels, 2006). Marden enters into the life of things in order to find an inner core of being, a sensuous and emotional place where he can be free to express his world imaginatively. Marden's work is also influenced by uncertainty and feelings of reservation. Bois (1993) has written about Marden's doubt: a state of mind that entails him reworking, reflecting and re-examining his work over time and never being entirely sure that his art is valid, either for himself or for his time. This uncertainty leads to invention and experimentation and according to Wylie (1998) to an exploration of "new ways to use colour and line to register in a resolutely abstract manner his responses to the private/public, personal/professional worlds

in which he exists" (p. 14). In this moment I see an intriguing connection between Marden and myself. I am not a visual artist, but a teacher and researcher. In my own professional world of education, I too experience long moments of uncertainty and doubt and in times when clarity, order and accountability are the call of the day. It is a lack of certainty and the spirit of exploration that brings me to this doctorate; a desire to gently shift the surface sand with probing finger-tips, to dig deeply and get where things are dense and heavy and moist. Like Marden, I want to find another way of perceiving and taking action in a world that is too familiar, too loaded with rigid and fragmented ways of thinking and behaving, too caught up in prescribed antidotes for perceived ills. Here at the beginning, as I contemplate the paintings of Brice Marden, I decide to enter this doctorate imaginatively.

In the Museum of Modern Art I stand before the painting *Skull with Thought (1993-1995)*, a large canvas typical of other paintings Marden created at this time. Tentative, continuous lines move intuitively around the space. The background is the colour of parchment and yet close observation reveals the shadows of former lines that have been painted over and reworked. The network of lines coloured red, blue, green and ochre seem simple and child-like and yet they sit upon a complex surface that has been built over time like sedimentary rock. Marden worked on this painting for three years. The title provides a platform for sense-making and I begin to make out a skull-like shape in red hovering toward the edges of the canvas. My eye tracks a colour and I find my natural, meditative path is interrupted abruptly by another colour and I am caught in spaces amongst interweaving lines or at dead ends with no clear way forward. I consider the

connections to my own thinking processes: how I get lost in thought and preoccupied by ideas; how I follow tangents and meander without purpose and find myself in unexpected places, sometimes at difficult cross-roads. My journey in this maze of interconnected lines and within the spaces they create could be continuous; might be permanent. There may be no conclusive way out.

I hover around the edge, both a homecomer and stranger in this environment gazing at the painting on the museum wall. I am moved by its beauty, its sense of intuitive harmony. I know this feeling well. It's like a warm inner rush of mind and emotion working together like electricity. It is a sense of connectedness; a complex linking of the internal and external inspired by sensibilities within and the aesthetic nature of what is seen. Dewey (1933) calls it being "alive". This is the feeling I experience when I am thinking and learning deeply. I feel it now as I write. I know what it is to be "wide awake" (Greene, 1978) in the classroom where both teaching and learning intertwine in multifaceted ways. I have also experienced numbness there, a condition bordering on sleep. The classroom is an artificial, contrived learning environment that can dampen enthusiasm and quash individuals. It is also a privileged environment full of potential. The classroom is a 'contact zone' (Pratt, 1991), a social space as Pratt suggests where different views and cultures can "meet, clash and grapple with each other" (p. 4). It brings together many minds to build shared understandings, to nurture multiple ways of responding, to experience first-hand the knotty complications of thinking. Greene (1980) argues for educational experiences that "break through the 'cotton wool' of dailyness and passivity and boredom and come awake to the coloured,

sounding, problematic world" (p. 7). Imaginative, impassioned, critically aware teachers are vital to the creation of such experiences.

On the floor before me in the Museum of Modern Art, sitting around the base of Marden's painting, is a group of people. An American woman, clearly a facilitator, sits with a group of children and their parents. Each child has an adult with them (they are mostly women) and everyone has name tags. As I watch from the sidelines, my first thought is that they seem different to groups I tend to see in Australia clustered together in gallery spaces. I wonder why I make this judgement. They do not seem to be part of a tour. They are not being spoken to by an authoritative voice. There is no sense of expert. They are not here to have their knowledge tested. There are enough familiar signs here though, to make me think that these people are here to potentially think and learn together. I notice that the facilitator's skin is black and that there are no black families in the group. They are diverse in their ethnicity and there are even numbers of young boys and girls. I notice that the children and adults seem confident and comfortable in this environment. They relax on the floor boards like this is their home. They focus totally on the painting, like they are looking through a window at something astonishing. I am aware of their intentional and united convergence and this is what sparks my interest as someone interested in cultures of thinking and learning. They are engaged and unaware of loiterers like me dwelling around the edges. I sense their minds working even before they speak. Fascinated, I reach for my note book.

The woman speaks excitedly and through her open questions, conversation emerges tentatively. She asks: *What do you see? What are you feeling right now? What does this make you think about?* She hands around slips of white paper and asks people to write down one word that comes to their minds. This is a 'sound byte' she says; a way to capture thought simply. The children and adults share their words: *complications, tubes, vines, connections, back brush, rainforest, life forms.* As people say their words, they justify their ideas. They speak about other paintings they have seen, personal experiences, visual images caught in the mind's eye and abstract concepts they are considering. There is no sense that any one person's idea is better than another's. Children and adults alike share and explore their responses; all ideas are valid and interesting. The woman asks: *What sort of thinking is happening in this painting?* A girl replies that she can see *decision-making*. Another says *confusion*. Another says *creativity*. With each offering, the woman asks a more probing question: *What makes you say that? Where does that idea come from?* She helps them to extend their thinking. I am there on the edge of this conversation, writing it down in my notebook, seeing and hearing thinking happen.

This is what draws people to teach and be fascinated, in ongoing ways, with learning and teaching processes. Researchers working within Project Zero at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University use the term *making thinking visible* to describe processes that bring thinking to the forefront, that allow thinking to be seen. As teachers, when we see thinking, feel it, and hear it, we experience great excitement and are transported back to why we wanted to teach in the first place. Increasingly in classrooms teachers are asking: What sort

of thinking is happening here? What sorts of experiences have created that thinking? Where will that thinking lead? What can I do to further develop students' thinking? As professionals working within complex education systems, we are beginning to ask these questions of ourselves too. What sorts of thinking make our profession what it is? Whose thinking is most influential? What sorts of thinking do teachers do about their work? What gets in the way of good thinking? Where is our thinking taking us? I find myself looking intently at Marden's painting and pondering: could an image like this be used to depict and represent deeper levels of thinking and learning? What might it offer that other more dominant, linear and prescriptive frameworks do not offer? What would happen if I used an image like this, one grounded in aesthetic exploration and creativity, as the basis for trying to understand and improve thinking and learning in school contexts?

When I look closely at Marden's painting *Skull with Thought*, I think about paradox and contradiction and how opposites coexist so comfortably: connectedness and interruption; free flowing movement and fragility; boundaries and the absence of boundaries; harmony and disorder; layers of complexity and simplicity. Thought and feeling, the tracks of our meaning-making are not linear, logical, nor easily captured. There is ambiguity in this process, great difficulty and ultimately, beauty and wonderment. Marden's painting is socially constructed, developed and redeveloped over time through his preoccupation with 'significant symbols' (Geertz, 1973). Marden's work is influenced by an interest in mythology, history and landscape. Another series of paintings about the Muses draws upon classical Greek mythology while using the form of Chinese

calligraphy (Wylie, 1998), an unusual and challenging combination of form and content. Meaningful symbols, according to Geertz (1973), are what constitute culture and are the source of human behaviour and thinking. My thinking about Marden's work is developed through myriad complex cultural, social and personal experiences which I bring to the moment when I stand quietly before his painting. Now interestingly, I think again about Marden's work as I sit in front of my computer and write. I am inspired by his brave attempts to combine different schools of thought and genres that are usually regarded as separate fragments, different ways of knowing. Gardner (2007) calls this the synthesizing mind and suggests that "the ability to knit together information from disparate sources into a coherent whole is vital today" (p. 46). The juxtaposition I created between teachers' professional learning and Marden's art work was accidental if not serendipitous. These unforeseen connections explored for their meaning, help to enhance learning because they challenge us to think afresh. Perhaps this is an example of creative thinking at work. Bohm (1996a) in his exploration of creativity suggests that we have "been conditioned to mediocrity and mechanicalness" (p.27) and that this numb-like state prevents creative thinking. He believes that we need to discover what it is like to be creative and original, to be childlike in the way we see and wholehearted in our interest. We are conditioned to fall back on routined thoughts, recognisable behaviours and well accepted opinions that work to put us in a state of metaphorical sleep. What is needed is a *mind jolt*, an internal shove that forces us to be aware of and alert to our mechanical reactions (Bohm, 1996a, p. 30).

Challenging the organisational machine

If as Bohm (1996a) suggests, we spend most of our lives responding habitually and mechanically, what part does schooling play in forming and accentuating those ways of thinking and behaving? What sorts of thinking and learning dominate in our schools; for students, teachers and school leaders? Are they simply learning the formulas, routines and competencies that will enable them to operate ritualistically in society? Eisner (2005) suggests that a formalist vision of schooling dominates in industrialised nations and this imposes significant limits on what is possible for those learning in schools. He suggests that under this model, "the school administrator's main task is to run the organisational machine so that students achieve intended outcomes" (p. 1). In this vision curriculum and teaching are conceived as "rule guided activities that lead to prespecified ends" (p.1). If this is the dominant paradigm in schools, what ways of thinking and learning are foregrounded and given value? What happens to those students who find it difficult to engage and meet prescribed expectations? How are teachers urged to play a pivotal role in the organisational machine? And how are school leaders persuaded to take this vision "seriously" (Eisner, 2005 p. 1)?

Eisner (2005) suggests that "we live in a culture that is quite anxious about its schools" (p. 1). He contends that as nations operating in a global economy our competitiveness and success is linked to educational outcomes. If young people are not imbued with certain skills and knowledge then, as Eisner (2005) suggests "our culture is doomed to be second or even third rate" (p. 1). Scores in internationally and nationally approved tests provide the evidence with which we

judge our success or failure. This emphasis on competition and measuring achievement within narrow, rigid parameters, leads to powerful and influential notions related to the nature of thinking and learning. One example of this is the notion that good thinking and learning is about getting a single 'correct' answer. This way of thinking sits in contrast to the idea that there are multiple perspectives and many solutions to a problem. It also sends a strong message to those who are being judged that making mistakes is unacceptable. Bohm (1996a) contends that from an early age we learn that mistakes and taking risks are undesirable and improper behaviours more suited to those who fail.

> From early childhood, one is taught to maintain the image of "self" or "ego" as essentially perfect. Each mistake seems to reveal that one is an inferior sort of being, who will therefore, in some way, not be fully accepted by others. This is very unfortunate, for, as has been seen, all learning involves trying something and seeing what happens (Bohm, 1996a, p. 5).

Bohm goes on to suggest that we are not in the habit, as parents and teachers, of recognising young people as potentially creative (Bohm, 1996a, p. 7). Most of our energy goes into encouraging conformity and insisting young people imitate what is acceptable and deemed correct. As a doctoral student, working within traditionally defined narrow boundaries and expectations, I am challenged by the content of my research to find other ways of expressing my thinking and learning. I aim to resist mechanical, formulaic expectations in the hope that with a more open, creative, synthesizing mind, I will find and model alternative ways to examine and represent deeper levels of thought and learning.

Essentially, this doctorate is about the cultures of thinking and learning that exist within educational institutions. I am particularly interested in secondary schools and teacher education courses in universities. I begin by foregrounding the voices of young people in the middle years of schooling. How do they think learning occurs? What ways of thinking dominate in their school cultures? I am concerned to see the level of anxiety that many young people feel at school and wonder about the impact of this on their learning. In subsequent chapters I examine two professional learning experiences that involve teachers: one takes place within a secondary school context and involves a number of teachers who work in a large three campus secondary school. The other takes place within a university Master of Education course. Finally, I examine my own learning and thinking as I participate in a planned professional learning activity for teacher educators. I want to create an "authentic dissertation" (Four Arrows, Don Trent Jacobs, 2008) that values personal experience, pays attention to connections and possible meanings, accepts diversity and uncertainty, understands the centrality of the relational and emotional, sees learning as dynamic, regards storytelling as an empowering research methodology and seeks to challenge the organisational machine.

Teachers' professional learning

In a time when society is 'anxious' (Eisner, 2005) about its schools and focused on performance, teachers' professional learning is seen as a means of improving outcomes. A recent research project conducted for the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) by Ingvarson, Meiers and Beavis (2005) claimed

that: “Professional development for teachers is now recognised as a vital component of policies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in our schools” (p. 2). However, as Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi (1992) suggest, we have been preoccupied in education with creating sure-fire models that propose to guarantee quick and relatively easy solutions. Our understandings about teachers and their learning has been limited as a consequence. This has also led to relatively ineffectual approaches.

> This preoccupation with prescription has led to the formation of bodies of professional knowledge which have been largely ignored by professionals-in-action since they have found that little of this prescriptive technology is appropriate to specific situations whose nature is uniquely personal, instinctive, intuitive, reflective and practical (Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi, 1992, p. 52).

Traditionally, professional development opportunities for teachers have been haphazard, rigid and simplistic: haphazard in that activities are largely geared toward attracting individuals to sporadically organised events; rigid in that programs revolve around predetermined topics and follow prescribed procedures at set times; and simplistic in that teachers are predominantly treated as audiences who can be attracted to packaged activities located outside of the complex arena of their real work. Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi (1992) suggest that “inservice education has disregarded the teacher as an active learner” (p. 53) and has been preoccupied with changing teacher beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (p. 54). Change that is geared around the implementation of narrowly defined, preferred practices serve to dehumanise and diminish teachers who are expected to passively serve those who have particular political, social and economic

interests. A preoccupation with change and specifically defined practices, without a focus on individuals and their personal thinking and learning, is bound to fail.

Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi (1992) argue that in order to understand teachers' knowledge and learning "we need to know it in the way that the individual teacher does" (p. 57). They emphasise the biographic nature of teachers' knowledge and how they continue to learn: "the deeply personal nature of the architecture of self created through interaction of person and context that the private person brings to the public act of teaching" (p. 60). Narrative and storytelling allow us to enter into the 'architecture of self' in revealing ways. This doctorate foregrounds the voices of many teachers and students as well as my own. It presents *slices of life*, a term I have borrowed from Green (2002). In her explanation of the title of the text she edits on qualitative research snapshots, she writes,

> Selected depictions of people's lives are provided within the text and can be viewed as slices of their lives. The term "slice" emphasises that, while the depictions of their lives are only partial, they are not random or lacking coherence. Further, what any slice looks like is affected not only by who is doing the looking but also by how it is cut and who does the cutting (Green, 2002, p. vii).

The metaphor serves my own interests well as it foregrounds the centrality I wish to place on life experiences related to learning (and what can be understood from them) and also on the delicate process of slicing. It seems dangerous to suggest, but here in this text, I hold and manipulate the knife. Rather than making the cuts

secretly and intuitively, I aim to slice openly and reflexively. This is likely to be more important when one intends to conduct and write about research in exploratory ways. There is always the chance that when a writer tries to avoid routine and accepted structures that they will be at best misunderstood; at worst condemned.

Beauty, sedimentation and connectedness: In search of learning that is meaning-full

To return to Greene (1973), as a researcher I juggle the ambiguous roles of being both stranger and homecomer. I walk a tightrope between these two points. I strive to take the "stranger's vantage point" (Greene, 1973, p. 268), to gaze with curiosity and wonderment, to scrutinize and analyse with care and rigor, to understand afresh and to search for new insight. Yet, the field of education is very much my home, a place where my personal and professional identity has been constructed and reconstructed over many years. I am shaped by theoretical perspectives and personal experiences that become powerful lenses on the world and guide me, sometimes unknowingly, to place incisions in places where others might not. Traditionally researchers have been encouraged to stand aside and gaze in rational, critical, objective ways; to always be strangers. I have a strong personal desire to be in home territory and to enter that space in imaginative ways; to get close so that seeing and knowing is deepened, personal connections are made, and new, creative possibilities are revealed.

Marden's painting, as Csikszentmihalyi (1992) suggests, "is not just a picture, but a 'thought machine' that includes the painter's emotions, hopes, and ideas – as well as the spirit of the culture and the historical period in which he lived" (p. 118). The process of painting sets the 'machine' in motion, just as the process of closely attending to Marden's artwork sets my own thoughts reeling. Marden's painting and my experience at the Museum of Modern Art are significant entry points that open up, in expressive ways, three conceptual ideas that are highly visual that I will interweave throughout this text: connectedness, sedimentation and beauty.

Marden's painting of interconnected lines inspired me to think again about the role that connectedness plays in learning. Duckworth (2006) suggests that depth in learning can be thought of as the "many different kinds of connections that can be made among different facets of our experience" (p. 69). I am reminded of Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) concept of flow where high levels of achievement and feelings of happiness are developed through complicated interconnections between skill, prior knowledge, reflection, motivation, emotional involvement and challenge. I think about the importance that notions of connectedness play not only for our thinking and learning, but also for our social and emotional wellbeing. I think about Rodgers and Raider-Roth's (2006) concept of presence in teaching. For them presence is "a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate next step" (p. 266). Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) suggest that effective teaching can not be

"reduced to a series of behaviours or skills" (p. 266) but is rather a complex practice that involves the interconnection of "self-knowledge, trust, relationship and compassion" (p. 266).

The notion of sedimentation arose as I peered through the layers present in Marden's painting. Over many hours the artist applied and reapplied layers of paint. We see the residue of preceding colours barely visible on the painting's surface. Similarly, a rock is never just its' most recent layer. Its form contains evidence of prior times and the conditions that prevailed then. Learners too are like this. To any new learning they bring prior knowledge, relationships, beliefs, opinions, tensions and so on. This is the 'architecture of self', a term originally used by Pinar (1988) to describe the unique life circumstances that shape and reshape all learners. Sedimentation suggests a non-hierarchical, horizontal structure that is weighty with personal and contextual associations, but avoids notions of oppression. A structure that is multilayered and complex is an alternative to simple, linear, logical structures. I use the image of sedimentation to help me to structure and organize this text as well as my thoughts. Writing in this way makes visible some of the layers inherent in thinking and learning experiences and consequently reveals imaginative, surprising possibilities.

Finally, the notion of beauty is also central in the creation of this text; a concept that is not usually associated with educational research. Marden's painting inspires me to consider beauty and the pleasures that are gained through creating, viewing and reading something that is aesthetically pleasing and intriguing to the senses. Dewey (1934) suggests that beauty is an emotional term (p. 134). When

an object “lays hold of us” (Dewey, 1934, p. 134), when we are moved and roused by something our response is not completely understood or logical. Bohm (1996a) suggests that beauty is not just that which “tickles one’s fancy”, but that which is “true to itself” (p. 40). Beauty is a unifying, engaging force. In objects of beauty we see symmetry and harmony (Bohm, 1996a) and may also be moved by the fragile, sensitive, delicate quality of things. I am often moved by the beautiful ways that teachers and students describe their learning experiences; by the evocative language they use (whether it is verbal or visual) and by the revealing, poetic metaphors they construct. As a writer I aim to draw attention to beauty in an attempt to show what is fundamentally absent from mechanistic, prescribed practices that anesthetize the senses.

Ideas and images associated with connectedness, sedimentation and beauty help me to understand and depict learning experiences that are deeply meaning-full. The professional learning experiences that I describe here are full of meaning for the participants involved; they are optimal learning experiences that help to shape the ‘architecture of self’ (Pinar, 1988) because they are multifaceted. Meaning-full learning experiences are highly personalized and contextual but also draw attention to broader cultural, political and social factors that interconnect with the personal in complex ways. They involve authentic connections to prior experiences and the existing understandings, assumptions and values that learners bring; they also involve being self-reflexive, understanding one’s “own limitations, distortions and agenda” (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998a, p. 4). They involve dynamic interactions between people, the spaces and places they inhabit and the past. Experience as Dewey (1934) suggests, “becomes an integral part of

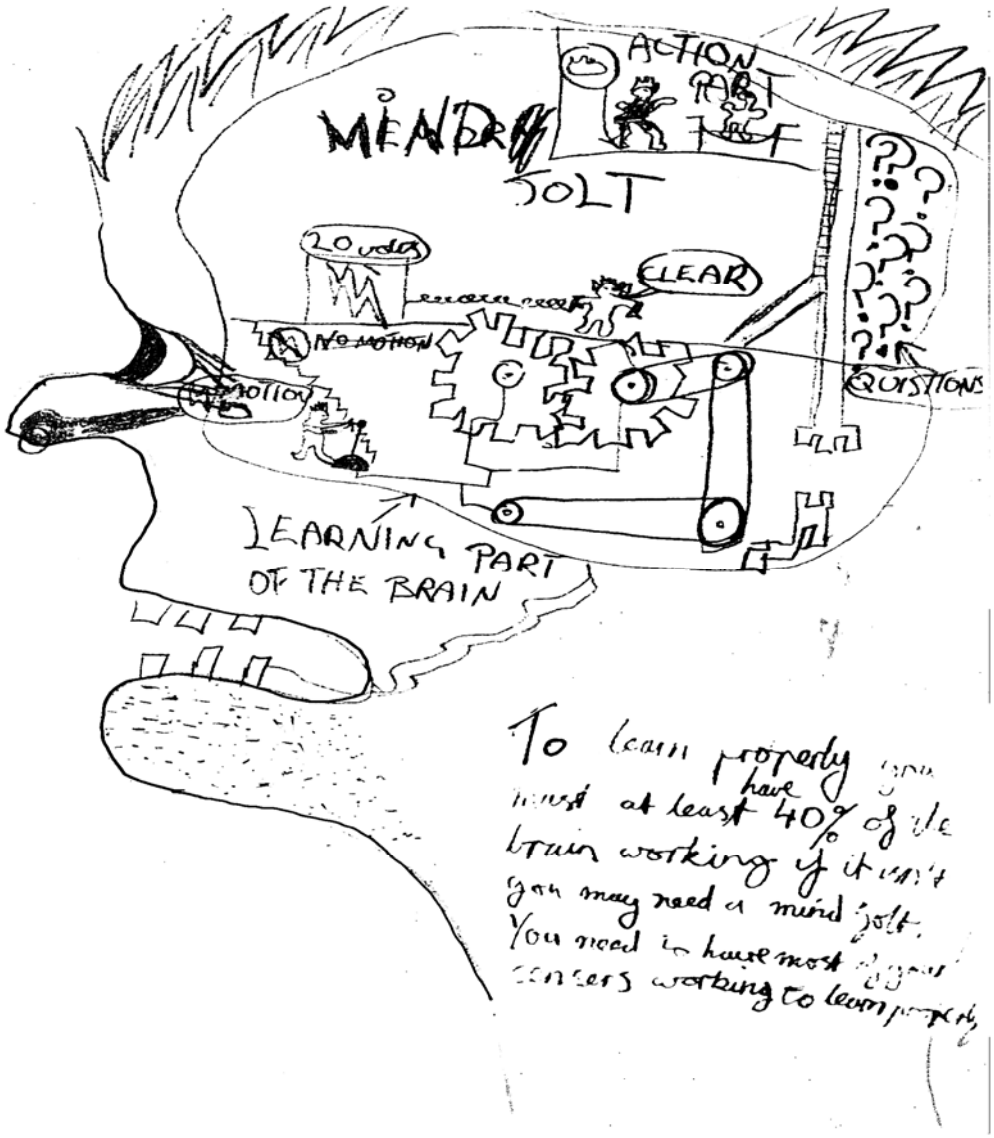
the self" (p. 108). Meaning-full learning experiences foster and draw to the surface ongoing, cumulative connections between people, ideas, emotions, contextual and situational elements and broader social and political ideologies. They are fundamentally relational in nature and reliant on people making connections and building bonds through ongoing dialogue about experience. Disconnections, misunderstandings, mistakes and tensions are also important as they lead the way to new ways of thinking, critical questioning, revitalized connections and imaginative possibilities for action. Meaning-full learning experiences are beautifully designed and involve an interesting play between thoughtful planning and spontaneity. There is a messy combination of purpose and adventure. The substance and form of the experience is challenging, rich, dynamic, problematic and vital. This not only provides the basis for problem solving and critical thinking, but also for aesthetic appreciation and diverse emotional responses. Learning experiences that are meaning-full are not highly structured and contrived, rather they are designed so that participants are empowered to make decisions, take responsibility, imagine possibilities and create new ways forward. In this doctorate I describe a range of professional learning experiences for teachers that are meaning-full and suggest that we work urgently and in different ways to improve the quality of learning experiences teachers engage in. Not only will this enhance the working lives of teachers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992), but perhaps more importantly, the lives of young people who hope to learn in schools.

While the main research projects within this doctorate focus on teachers and their professional learning, I turn first to a focus on students. How do they perceive

their everyday experiences in classrooms? How do they think learning occurs? What role do they believe teachers play in helping them to learn? Do they experience deep levels of learning and if so, what is that experience like? As Sizer and Sizer (1999) so powerfully suggest, in classrooms everyday, the students are watching. They learn from what we do as teachers and from how we operate as school communities: from what we model, how we go about thinking and learning, how we relate to one another and from our routines and policies. In that small moment on the floor in the Museum of Modern Art, I saw young people grappling with ideas, personal experiences, and close observations. They were making unusual and interesting connections and sharing those generously with others. They were engaging with something open and problematic. The young people were invited to "join the struggle" (Sizer & Sizer, 1999, p. 25) rather than be passive onlookers. Believing that young people offer rich insights into how we work and learn in schools and that their voices can help us to construct "more feasible reform platforms" (Smyth, 2006b, p. 288), I turn now to them. What are they watching and how is that influencing them as young learners?

Chapter Two

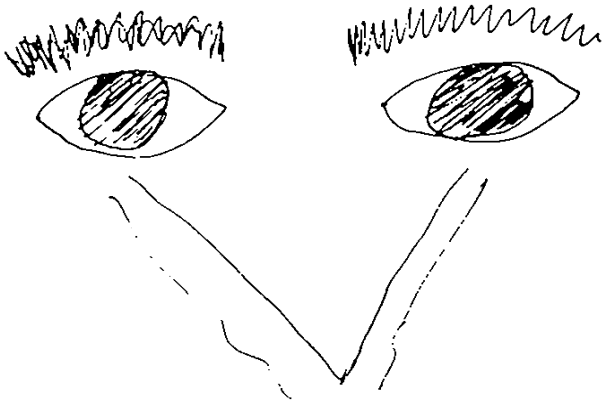
A system in need of a mind jolt



To learn properly you must at least have 40% of the brain working if it isn't you may need a mind jolt. You need to have most of your sensers (sic) working to learn properly.

(Jake, male, year 8 student)

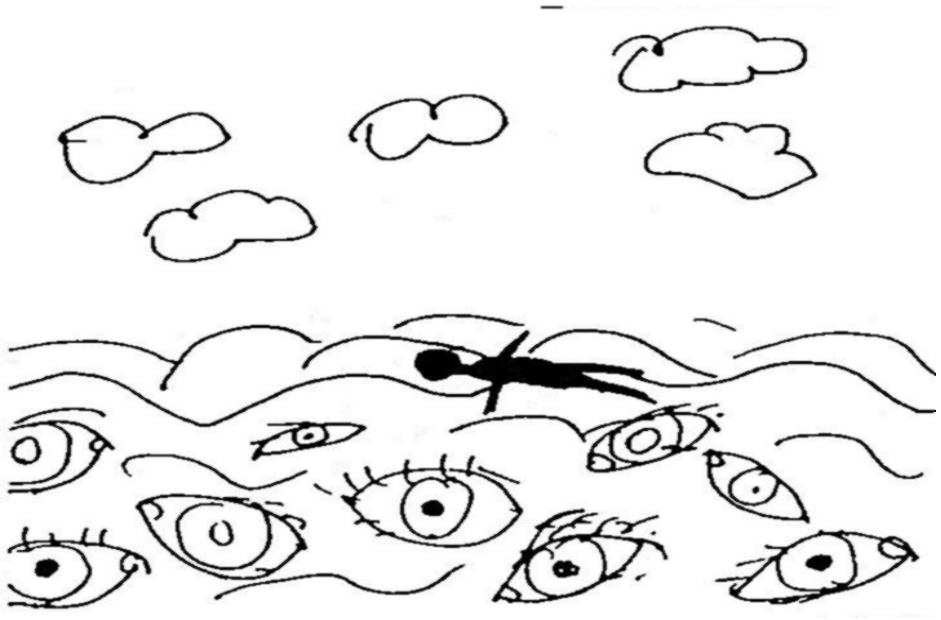
Context: The secondary school classroom



I look at school with only my eyes.

I do the set work and try to do everything I can to finish it. The quality of the work isn't always good, but this doesn't bother me. I never go deep. I never use a microscope to look at anything. I prefer to hang around and stare.

(Fin, male, year 9 student)



I feel like I am floating on a sea of eyes that are always watching me as I look up at the clouds where my thoughts are. The eyes are like the pressures and struggles I feel.

(Mindy, female, year 9)

Learning to look and listen and "*see into the life of things*" (Wordsworth, 1798): students voice their thoughts and feelings about learning at school

> Having 'voice' implies that one has a language in which to give expression to one's authentic concerns, that one is able to recognise those concerns, and further that there is an audience of significant others who will listen. (Elbaz, 1990, p. 17)

Voice, Elbaz (1990) contends, is a term "used against the background of a previous silence" (p. 17). For too long students' and teachers' voices have been muffled if not silent in the raucous, rowdy debates about schooling. Perhaps the language they use is deemed less authoritative; perhaps their messages are too complicated, too confronting, too emotional, too contextualized, and too difficult to deal with. According to Day, Pope and Denicolo (1990) educational research and reform agendas have tended to focus not on understanding the subjective experiences of teachers and students in schools, but on isolating specific teaching behaviours in order to define and develop 'effective' and 'quality' teaching. Concerted efforts to distil performance indicators, teaching and learning standards and accountability measures have shifted our focus away from people and their communities and on to unified and mandated management structures; away from observing and listening to being scrutinized and told. Day, Pope and Denicolo (1990) believe that this short-sightedness has led to blaming teachers for deficits in technical expertise, subject knowledge and personal qualities. Similarly, our view of young people is often a deficit one. Their literacy and numeracy skills are declining, their behaviour is challenging, their social skills are poor, and they are too materialistic and apathetic about the future (McGraw, 2007). Positioning students and teachers in these narrow and negative ways

works to silence diverse voices and estrange those who have genuine concerns. What might we learn as "significant others" (Elbaz, 1990, p. 17) from listening closely to those voices; from using our eyes to "see into the life of things" (Wordsworth, 1798); from engaging in "thoughtful looking" (Seidel, 1998); from taking a "stranger's vantage point" (Greene, 1973)? How can we surface "authentic concerns" (Elbaz, 1990, p. 17) in ways that are meaning-full, that do not reduce complex experiences to simplistic deductions?

In recent times educational researchers have become more interested in students' and teachers' thinking and practice and in representing "students' and teachers' lives and experiences in authentic ways" (Day, Pope, Denicolo, 1990, p. 2). While many researchers have believed for some time that it is "teachers' subjective school related knowledge which determines for the most part what happens in the classroom" (Halkes & Olson, 1984), the current emphasis on high performance, standards, statistical data and accountability in schools has meant that the voices of teachers and students that raise issues of complexity and concern are difficult to hear. In a climate that places value on measurable outcomes, high stakes testing and evidence-based research, the avenues of expression are limited, particularly if those voices are non-linear, subjective, rebellious, ambiguous and problematic in nature. As Elbaz (1990) suggests, a focus on voice is about redressing an imbalance and this requires "the power to name, to define one's own reality and to determine, at least in part, the way the rest of the world must relate to that reality" (p. 17). If we are to hear the unique and authentic voices of those who live their lives in schools, then we must search

for language to effectively capture thinking and be prepared to give those voices 'serious attention' (Seidel, 1998).

Sizer and Sizer (1999) contend that the "thoughts which are roiling around in the students' heads should be invited out and put to work" (p. 26). Students' capacity to grapple with ideas, their opinions and skills as well as their confusion and questioning, Sizer and Sizer (1999) argue, should form the basis of curriculum. What they say can also help us to examine the school as a context for learning and judge its effectiveness. Smyth (2006a) argues that it is imperative that we develop leadership approaches that foreground and pay attention to what students' say.

> The question of how to pursue forms of leadership that listen to and attend to the voices of the most informed, yet marginalized witnesses of schooling, young people, has to be the most urgent issue of our times (Smyth, 2006a, p. 279).

As Smyth (2006a) suggests, young peoples' experiences, ideas and opinions need to be heard, understood and acted upon because they are "the most informed". In this chapter I foreground the voices of students and examine their thoughts about learning and their experiences of learning at school. Without this important perspective our understanding of what is needed for teacher professional learning and reform in schools will be impoverished. I examine an approach that enables students to give voice to complex thoughts about learning and teaching through visual and verbal language and the construction of metaphor. I also argue for a renewed emphasis on the personal in schools, on creating what Fielding (2006) would call a 'person-centred learning community'. Fielding argues that the crisis

we currently face is that "the personal is used for the sake of the functional" (p. 302). He suggests that "students are included or excluded, valued or not, primarily on the basis of whether they contribute to organizational performance of the school" (p. 302). Alternatively, in a person-centred approach to schooling, Fielding (2006) argues, the way we function is informed by the personal and transformed by "moral and interpersonal character" (p. 301). Finally, this chapter argues that 'serious attention' (Seidel, 1998) must be given to what is revealed through empowering young people to speak.

In essence this is a phenomenological study. According to van Manen (1990):

> Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks, "What is this or that kind of experience like? ….Phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world (van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

What is the lifeworld (van Manen, 1990) of the young people who sit regularly in classrooms? What meanings do they make from their lived experience? How can I as a researcher and teacher, adequately describe and interpret these meanings and capture their richness, depth and complexity? As van Manen so beautifully suggests, phenomenology is a "poetizing activity" (van Manen, 1990, p. 13). This is not rational, reductive research where conclusions, deductions, summaries and recipes for future action wrap up each section; rather this research is exploratory, tentative, sensitive and searching. The language of such research

needs to capture the journey and those insights that emerge; it must be evocative, resonant, and thoughtful. It is through the writing that meanings are created; that we can as writer, reader and researcher go back to the original experience and relive it, feel it, and know it. The narrative form enables me to evoke life moments and transport the reader to that time. As writer, I create "a hybrid textual form" (van Manen, 1990, p. 121) that combines narrative, creativity and the literary form, with self reflection and autobiography, and also with critical, probing, inquiry based language that urges for change. I seek to compel, encourage reflection, involve the reader personally, transform practices, and measure my own interpretive sense (van Manen, 1990, p. 121). I will return later to discuss research processes and methodology, but for now, know that I write in order to "see into the life of things" (Wordsworth, 1798) and that there is no division between research and the revealing, creative processes of watching and writing.

The students are *watching.* What are they *thinking?*

> They watch us all the time. The students, that is. They listen to us, sometimes. They learn from all that watching and listening…. They attend to us, more than we usually realise (Sizer & Sizer, 1999, p. xvii).

Sizer and Sizer (1999) argue that as teachers we need to be acutely aware of what we do because our rituals, values, behaviours and ways of communicating, profoundly influence the young people we work with. Through school experiences and exchanges, students learn how to treat one another, think about themselves, respond to problems, communicate with others, and so on. They also

learn, often indirectly, about learning: how it happens, what it feels like, how it can be used. Claxton (2006), along with other educators who argue that schools are in need of major reform (Hargreaves, 2003; Elmore, 2002; Ellyard, 2001; Senge et al., 2001; Fullan, 1999), contends that school should better prepare young people for the future. He suggests that building capacity to learn as well as understanding *how* learning occurs is of paramount importance. Teachers, Claxton (2006) argues, need to focus more explicitly through their language and the modeling of behaviours, on how to learn and build important thinking dispositions. While he argues that there has been some support in schools for an increased focus on learning, he suggests that "practical progress has so far been frankly disappointing" (p. 2). Perhaps this is in part due to conflicting conservative pressures on schools that emphasise marketization, accountability, uniformity, direct instruction and performance in high stakes tests. These are anxious times where what happens in schools is influenced by complex, competing political, economic, religious as well as educational concerns (Apple, 2006). Worryingly, Apple (2006) suggests that a growing emphasis on centralized control of curriculum and standards in America is leading to growing inequalities. He argues that in such times employing the act of 'repositioning', a stance that enables one to see the real effects of any set of policies or practices (p. 229), is crucial. This approach "in essence says that the best way to understand what any set of institutions, policies, and practices does is to see it from the standpoint of those who have the least power" (p. 229). Apple (2006) suggests that the voices we hear most prominently are those "who have the most economic, cultural, and social capital" (p. 229). In the 'battleground' that Apple (2006, p. 230) suggests education has become over the past decade, hearing the voices of

those who are silenced yet are most affected, is crucial. Undoubtedly, students' voices are the least considered when it comes to those who are deemed authorities on teaching and learning; yet as Freire (1998) suggests, what is most important in teaching is "comprehension of the value of [students'] sentiments, emotions, and desires." (p. 48). While it is important to acknowledge that young people have different viewpoints about school and diverse experiences, what can we understand about the nature of learning at school from paying close attention to what young people say? What does the contemporary school experience teach young people about learning? What attitudes are they building through school and how do they perceive themselves as learners? Research shows that serious levels of disengagement and alienation at school have led to increasing numbers of young people in the middle years opting out of school too early (Dwyer, 1996; Fine, 1991, Smyth & Down, 2004; Smyth & Hattam et al., 2004). In this context, where the consequences for young people and their communities are dire, it is vital that we elicit young peoples' perspectives and be prepared to respond with their interests uppermost in our minds.

Metaphors we *learn* by

I am in a classroom with twenty-four year 9 students. Their teacher sits at the back of the room. Her head is down and she is reading, perhaps her diary, or a students' workbook. I stand at the front of the room and explain who I am. Outside a man mows the lawn and in the corridor I hear someone fiddling with a difficult lock. I am not their teacher and so probably regarded with some

suspicion. Maybe they don't know how to easily place me and that is a good thing.

"I'm interested in learning," I say, "and I want to know what *you* think learning is. I've given you a blank sheet of paper. On it I'd like you to *draw* learning. That might sound like a strange thing to do. You might more easily find some words to define what learning is. But I'd like you to draw it first – and then, if you like, you can add some words, an explanation, after you've done the drawing. Don't talk to anyone else about your ideas; I'm interested in *your* personal thoughts. Try to stop yourself thinking, 'but I can't draw'. This is about capturing your ideas. There is no 'right' way to do that. Now, have a go. Draw learning."

Some students get straight into drawing like an idea has been percolating there for some time just waiting to come out. Others gaze into space and formulate their thoughts. Some start to draw tentatively as though the idea is surfacing alongside the marks on the paper. I am always surprised by how quickly students complete their drawings. And by how interesting they are.

Over six years I have asked hundreds of students to draw learning. All are secondary students in years 7, 8 and 9. The students come from inner city schools, suburban schools and rural schools in Australia. They come from independent and state schools. They come from large multi-campus schools and small community schools. They are from privileged schools in affluent suburbs and schools in lower socio-economic communities where youth unemployment is high. While I have collected drawings from students in a range of schools, the

ones I include here were created by students in one school (a large three campus metropolitan school) because the students gave permission for their work to be in the public domain (see Appendix 4). I have, however, selected representative drawings that express ideas that are frequently raised across different contexts. Students' real names are not used in this text.

The notion of 'drawing learning' started as an idea to surface students' thoughts about how learning happens. I was working as a Learning Specialist in a large metropolitan school, as someone who would work with teachers and students to develop better understandings of how people learn effectively through collaborative inquiries. The idea for drawing the concept of learning came from an original desire to give students a voice in the schools' deliberations about what approaches to teaching best helped students to learn. Given that students were familiar with verbal language used by teachers and parents to describe how learning occurs (ie work hard, listen carefully, read books), I decided to ask them to 'draw learning' in the hope that this more unusual and conceptual approach would surface something authentic and personally meaningful. Students would need to draw upon their personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) rather than on what they had been told. The act of drawing meant that they would avoid dictionary-like definitions. They would hopefully bring together threads from various experiences in order to represent their understandings in a conceptual, abstract manner. They would draw upon imaginative thought and use metaphor to capture the complexity of their everyday experience.

When I collected the first group of drawings I was astounded by their rich simplicity and moved by the powerful messages they contained about students' experiences at school. While I had not asked students to draw learning at school, I found that the great majority of students equated learning to what happens for them in the context of the classroom. The terms 'school' and 'learning' for most students seemed interchangeable. A minority of students created images that linked learning to life more generally and these students were mainly year 7 students at the beginning of secondary school. Perhaps students were influenced by the fact that they were seated in classrooms when they were asked to create their drawings; if they were in home environments or outside, maybe their thinking would be different. While I was not their classroom teacher, the students probably saw me as a 'teacher' and this may have created school-like associations. If I had been a parent, a swimming instructor, or an employer my request to draw learning may have been understood differently. I remember being surprised by the emphasis on the context of schooling in the images before me. Another, immediate response was to the highly emotional nature of the drawings students had created. There were clearly many students who regarded learning as something negative and to be avoided at all costs! I became so intrigued by the students' drawings (and by how teachers responded to them) that, as a researcher working with teachers in their classrooms, I used as many opportunities as I could to ask students to draw learning.

Shortly, I will examine some of the themes and ideas that seem to emerge through the drawings but first I wish to make some other interesting points. There were no clear differences between the drawings in one school compared to

another school. Students in rural schools, for instance, did not create very different drawings to students in city schools. Girls did not create images that were different to those created by boys. Year 7 students on the whole, did not create drawings that were different in nature to those created by year 9 students. Students in independent schools did not have different conceptual ideas and experiences compared to those students in state government schools. What was interesting was that the drawings could not be categorized by the unique contextual features of particular groups; rather there were common ideas about learning at school that emerged across all schools and age groups. The student drawings are powerful representations of experiences, ideas and feelings that are common and shared.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) write in interesting ways about the concepts that we live by.

> The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend that our conceptual thoughts are largely metaphorical. While we may not normally be aware of our conceptual system, our use of language provides evidence for what that system is like. If, for instance, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, we regard argument as *war*, then our language and our very concept of argument is structured around that idea. We will talk about *attacking* our *opponent*, *defending* our own point of view,

gaining ground, *winning* the argument based on good *strategy* and *shooting down the opposition in flames*. This is the way we conceive of an argument: the patterns of our behaviour, the way we talk, our actions, the way we shape an argument, are influenced by our conception of argument as a battle. Focusing on one aspect of a concept, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) can prevent us from focusing on aspects that are inconsistent with the dominant metaphor. For example, concentrating on the warlike aspects of argument can stop us from seeing the cooperative aspects. Metaphors can highlight as well as hide elements and therefore are powerful determinants of meaning-making. Our cultural values and understandings are deeply inherent in the metaphors we use and live by. Dickmeyer (1989) suggests that metaphors are "an important first step in understanding a complex system. We reduce the complexity to one or two key and important features. We then find a physical system that exhibits those few key features, and we draw the analogy" (p. 152). Metaphors, Dickmeyer (1989) contends are therefore useful to help us "grasp intellectually systems that operate in ways quite mysterious to us, like learning" (p. 152). What then are the metaphors that dominate and influence our thinking about school and learning?

School as *container*

Lakoff and Johnson examine the notion of container metaphors:

> We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 29).

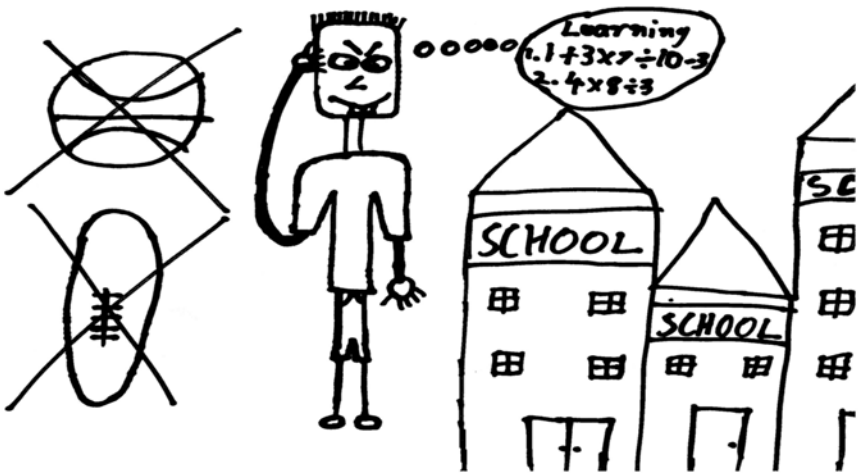
According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) we see ourselves as well as land areas, events, actions and activities as containers with boundaries that we move in and out of. We impose boundaries in order to define, quantify and control. We place walls around things in order to distinguish one thing from another. We contain things by giving them particular qualities and well defined boundaries that influence the way we view, experience and understand them. Schools are a good example of this. We *start* school and *finish* school. We *enter* the school grounds and *leave* the school grounds. We are *in* class and *out* of class; *in* trouble and *out* of trouble. School is very much a container that we move in and out of and understand in particular ways.

Schools traditionally, and even in contemporary times, are walled communities. In its most early form, the school was a monastery, a place of learning separate and protected from the outside world. Schools continue to be defined in relation to place and space. Schools are structural institutions that people are accepted into or not. You move in and out of different levels of education with each stage representing a transition and milestone. Children start school at an appropriate age and leave as young adults. In a physical sense, schools have traditionally been contained communities; buildings surrounded by fences that keep students and teachers inside and other members of the community out; classrooms with fixed walls and high windows that keep students controlled and focused, and observers at bay. Furniture, technology and other equipment, their positioning in classrooms and the way they are used, also serve to contain and frame activity, thought and interaction. Schools develop curriculum in packages that last for specific periods of time so that learning is managed within parameters and

chunked into fragments. What is formally assessed (and ignored) serves to package and frame what is learned more solidly. Schools have been compared to silos: solid, lofty storage containers. Loader (2007) writes: "Schools are silos because they have an existence quite separate from their community; they are not horizontally integrated with their community" (p. 62). Loader (2007) argues that "it is time to acknowledge that our silo-structured society impedes learning" (p. 62). He contends that schools have resisted change and maintain their silo-like structure because the criteria we currently apply to schools to judge success "relate more to successful silo-functioning than to successful student functioning in our complex world" (p.62). Smyth, Angus, Down and McInerney (2008) also argue that space and the ways we configure boundaries constrict possibilities for change and reinforce traditional relational hierarchies that are characterized by "domination, subservience, denigration and dependence" (p. 26). For Smyth, Angus, Down and McInerney (2008) a focus on 'free' and 'critical' spaces opens up new possibilities for dealing with entrenched inequalities. What impact does this notion of school as a static container have on student learning and on the way students think about learning as a process?

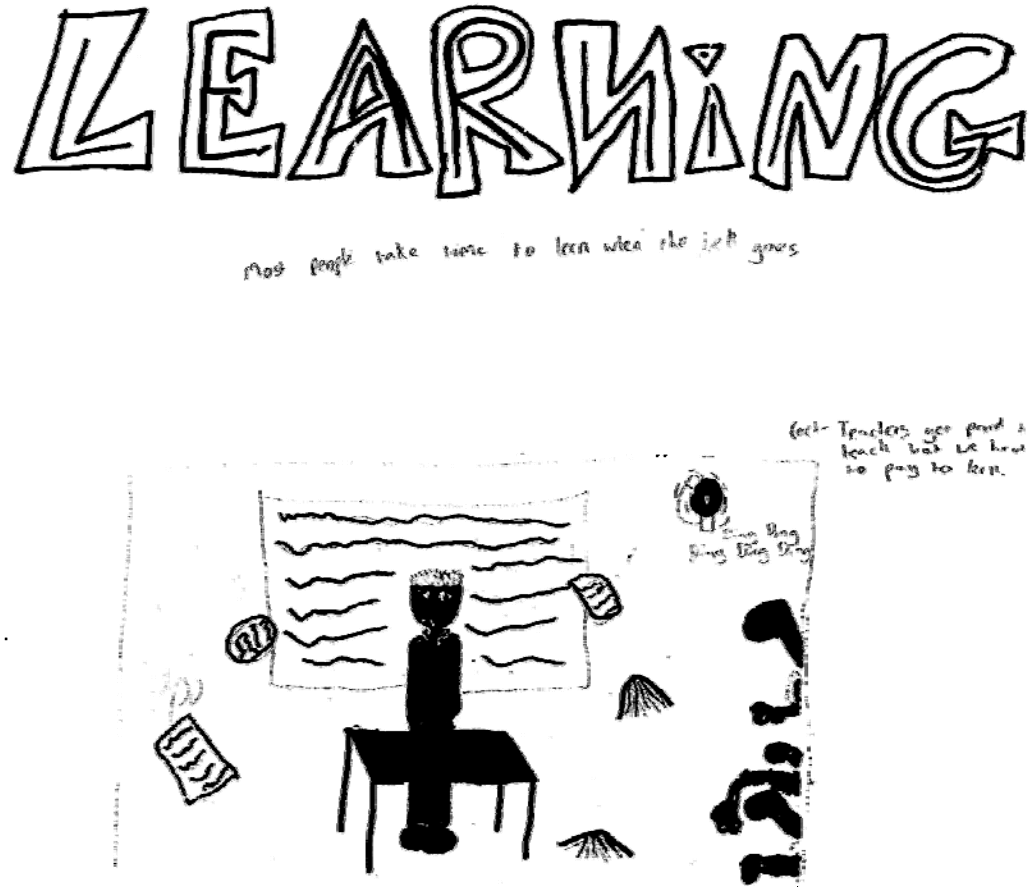
Most people take time to learn when the bell goes

Many of the student drawings show school/learning as a room: an enclosed, confined, sometimes stifling space with walls, windows and door. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose, there is an inside/outside orientation that suggests there are rigid boundaries around school experience.



(Callum, male, year 7 student)

This student seems to be in a state of conflict. He sees the school, represented as a row of closely constructed houses, as the place where learning that is valued by others takes place. Learning here is represented by mathematical equations where there is a focus on content and getting a correct answer. The equations exist without solutions, more as tasks set by a more knowing 'Other'. The expression on the student's face indicates confusion and bewilderment. He scratches his head and his eyes turn inward. The task seems nonsensical. The balls on the left side of the image represent play and physical activity. The crosses drawn through the balls seem to indicate that school is a no-play zone. The balls could also represent physical learning that traditionally takes place outside of school buildings, whereas learning about Mathematics that calls upon mental capacity takes place between the walls of the building and is perhaps perceived as more passive and less engaging.



Fact: Teachers get paid to teach but we have to pay to learn.

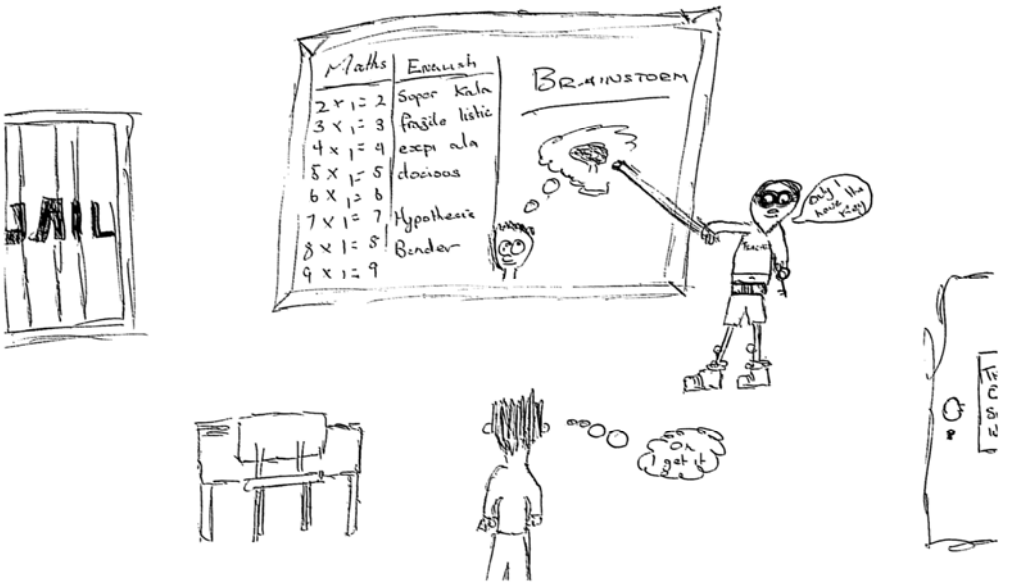
(Sam, male student, year 7)

This image shows a teacher left standing behind his desk after the bell rings; the students rushing eagerly through the open door, their limbs caught in a frozen moment as they sprint from the room. Books, that might otherwise represent learning, are flung into the air. The caption '*Most people take time to learn when the bell goes*' indicates that real learning occurs outside in a less confined environment. The blackboard with notes to be copied and their own books containing information seem to show 'knowledge' as an external aspect rather than something internal and personally meaningful. Even the teacher, standing

rigidly behind the front desk is disconnected and removed from the students' lives and concerns.

(Suzie, female student, year 8)

A common structural metaphor used by students to depict their idea of school/learning is the school as jailhouse. In this image, the student is trapped in a flat-roofed, barred cell. She looks unhappily outside at her friends who are together and located in an uninhibited space. For this student learning at school is a negative experience when her friends are absent. She points to the importance of support, care and belonging in learning and suggests that when power is abused and relationships are not positive at school, learning can not occur.

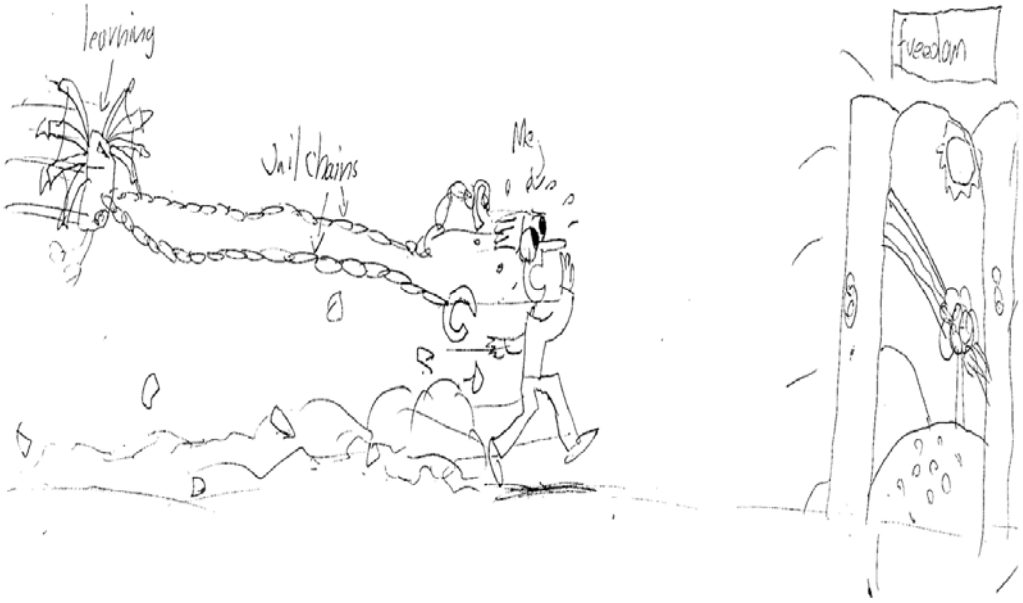


Here I am expressing my feelings for school like it's a jail. We are separated from the outside world.

(Thomas, male student, year 7)

In this image the barred window contains the sign '*Jail*' and on the door is a half visible sign '*The Outside World*.' The blackboard is used, as it is in many student drawings, to display knowledge usually represented by mathematical equations or words taken out of context. In this drawing the teacher is the jailer, the keeper of the keys. In many of the student drawings, teachers stand in front of blackboards. The teacher and the blackboard together act as significant symbols of knowledge and power. Knowledge is seen to be something out there and separate from the learner, contained within the minds of knowing others whose authority lies in the capacity to impose and control. The teacher ominously states: *Only I have the key* and uses a rod to point at an image of a student's brain on the blackboard. The key, clearly a significant symbol in the image, could represent access to knowledge signified by the teacher who is the conduit between the content and

the student ‘getting it’. The key could also be symbolic of power and access to freedom. There is clearly a keyhole in the door to the outside world. It is the teacher who holds the student prisoner, who keeps the student from more desired experiences. The teacher is regarded by many of the students as the keeper of knowledge, and is also blamed for the restrictive conditions students find themselves in.



(Phillip, male student, year 9)

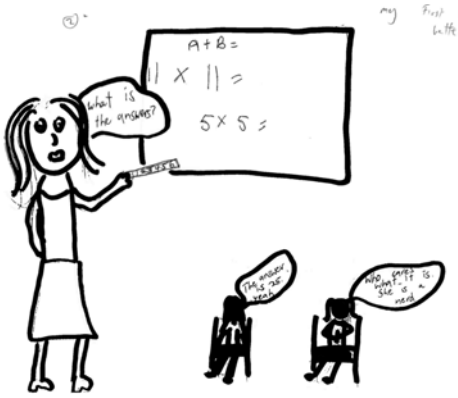
In this drawing the student runs desperately to escape the clutches of ‘learning’ represented disturbingly as a spinning chainsaw with claw-like chains (*jail chains*) and handcuffs. The student runs frantically towards *freedom* represented by the door that leads outside. What are we to make of an image like this? Learning is clearly regarded as a dangerous and constraining force, something to be avoided at all cost. Clearly this student is a clever, playful, conceptual thinker able to represent his thoughts powerfully and insightfully. How can innovative, creative thinkers of this caliber regard learning (possibly schooling) so negatively? Has

this student ever had the opportunity to think deeply about the concept of learning and how it happens in the context of personal experience? What might the impact of such negative views be on this students' future learning at school?

Learner as *empty vessel*

In many of the drawings the student is isolated and faceless, often sitting in a single chair at a table away from others. They have no sense of identity because they face the front of the room with their backs to the viewer.

(Kelly, female student, year 8)

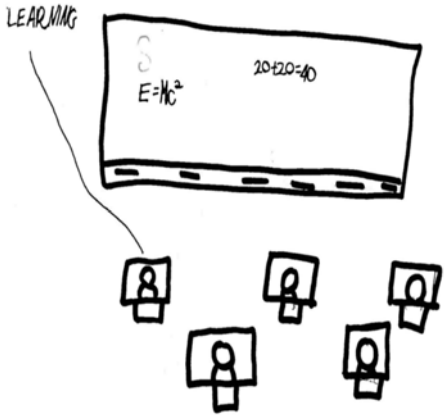


Teacher: What is the answer?

Student A: The answer is 25. Yeah.

Student B: Who cares what it is. She is a nerd.

(Sandy, female student, year 7)



(Ben, male student, year 8)

These drawings indicate a physical and emotional distance between learners, teachers and what is to be learned. The student figures are dispassionate, alienated and disconnected from one another, their teachers and the curriculum. The mathematical equations seem to be like a foreign language, meaningless, overwhelming and unrelated to a real context. What is valued by the institution is arriving at a correct or acceptable answer. The students respond in various ways to this expectation. Some try diligently to get it right, some sit in confusion feeling like failures when their responses are incorrect, and others simply do not care.

(Jack, male student, year 7)

(Nick, male student, year 8)

The notions of teaching as transmission and learner as empty vessel appear to be alive and well in schools. Crittenden (1996) has noted that the metaphor of learner as empty vessel into which the teacher pours knowledge, skills and attitudes while being historically powerful "still often captures the main style of educating" (p. 16). Freire (2000) uses the metaphor of banking to describe a similar process where the student is the depository and the teacher the depositor:

> In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry (Freire, 2000, p. 72).

The students in these drawings stand passively, blankly, almost robot-like as packages of content are placed inside the opened mind of the learner. The learner is submissive and does not need to take any strategic action at all: hands fall limply and satisfied grins indicate that this process is perhaps easy and devoid

of difficulty, like taking a prescribed pill. This way of understanding learning stands in complete contrast to the constructivist learning theories of educationalists like Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner and Haste (1987) who believe effective learners work actively in social contexts to make meaningful connections between prior experience, personal understandings and what is new. In the drawings learners see themselves as unreceptive containers to be filled with 'knowledge' that someone else has deemed useful and desirable. 'Knowledge' is seen to be externally located outside people and is represented as a system of symbols that can be transmitted to others. Learning is something that *happens* to the learner; it is set in motion by an external expert rather than being a self-directed or social process that requires active and purposeful engagement and links to prior experience. Notions of authority, control and oppression are vivid in these images which stand in direct contrast to the 'person-centred learning community' advocated by Fielding (2006). Fielding suggests that in organizations where the emphasis is on performance and compliance "any sense of caring for each other or for the young people with whom we work is marginalized or eradicated altogether" (p. 304). While these images might be reminiscent of narratives (Postman, 1995) that underlie traditional notions of schooling that are subject oriented, teacher centred, rules driven and memory focused; they are clearly also dominant and influential ways of thinking about current schooling experiences. Perhaps these notions are simply "handy" (Dickmeyer, 1989) and impressed so heavily in our collective conceptions of schooling that they are called upon almost automatically. Alternatively, perhaps these notions of schooling as oppressive and disempowering are alive and well – and purposely reinforced.

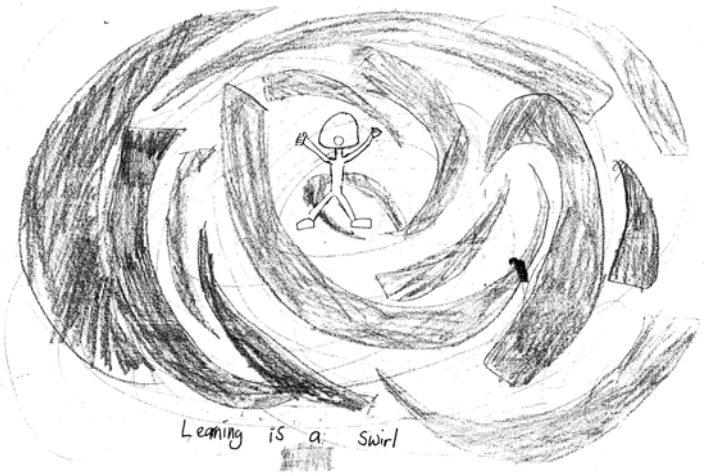
Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend that most of our metaphors have evolved over time and are imposed on us by people in powerful positions:

> In a culture where the myth of objectivism is very much alive and truth is always absolute truth, the people who get to impose their metaphors on the culture get to define what we consider to be true – absolutely and objectively true (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 160).

Metaphors of schooling that regard the learner as a passive recipient of objective bodies of knowledge are clearly alive and well, perhaps intentionally so. Many of the student drawings indicate that school is about learning what someone else (represented by a more powerful educator) contends is true and worthy. Students take an unquestioning, uncritical stand point. While they may find other things often represented by the 'outside world' more interesting and relevant, they do not question what they are about to receive even though, as Freire (2000) suggests, "the teacher mistakenly talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable" (p. 71). The 'truths' that are passed on, matter to us because as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, they allow us to survive and function in the world (p. 160). In contemporary times when the standards-based reform movement has led to an increased emphasis on performance in high stakes tests, rewards for high performing schools, and a range of stringent accountability mechanisms (Darling-Hammond, 2004), perhaps the student drawings suggest that there has been a renewed emphasis on the transmission approach to teaching and learning. These are anxious times and the

anxiety, as many student drawings suggest, is felt deeply, particularly when confusion dominates and failure is a real possibility.

Learning is a swirl



(Caitlyn, female student, year 9)

Metaphor can help us to surface and understand those emotions and ideas that are difficult for us to grasp and explain logically. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have found that metaphor "allows us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another. This suggests that understanding takes place in terms of entire domains of experience and not in terms of isolated concepts" (p. 117). By drawing parallels between school experience and other domains of experience, students are able to express the depth of their bewildering feelings about learning and school.

In the drawing by Caitlyn, the student, faceless but for an open, screaming mouth, is a trapped, isolated, overwhelmed figure in a dark, swirling landscape. The figure could be falling backwards into an ominous hole or lost in foreboding, foreign territory. Other students compare learning in school to being lost in tall grass, stuck in seaweed, isolated in a ditch, stuck in a traffic jam, being left behind in a race, hitting a brick wall, and missing the boat. Learning at deeper levels involves grappling with challenging issues. Being stuck and not knowing where to go next is frequent phase that occurs when we are engaged in something challenging. Effective learners, however, know that "knowledge is not enough" (Perkins, 1994, p. 30). They know to pose critical questions, to call upon appropriate strategies, to reflect on prior experience and persevere (Perkins, 1995; Costa & Kallick, 2000; Ritchhardt, 2002; Claxton, 2006). Effective learners are often acutely aware that struggling occurs when problem-solving and that with effort, persistence, time and support they can break through this phase. Alternatively, there is a strong sense in the drawings that confusion, failure and bewilderment is both common and self-defining and that many young people are unsure how they can understand and move beyond the difficulties they experience. Their ignorance about how learning occurs and their incapacity to operate independently and collaboratively leaves them feeling worthless. These statements are written next to drawings students have created:

I struggle but I get nowhere.

Most of the time I just can't focus. I don't understand what we're talking about or doing and when she tells us to go on with the work; I can't because I don't understand.

I get so confusion (sic) and with that I get bored. And I miss the boat.

I try my hardest to get everything in on time and to my best ability. When I hand my work in, I think I will do well but when I get it back I get let down with my mark. It makes me not want to try.

Whenever I try to do something useful, I stuff up. I hit a rock in shallow water.

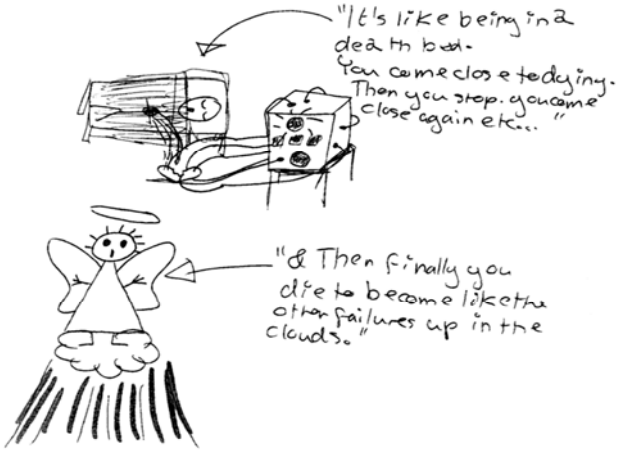
I go off and think about other things and in a way my brain turns off. I try to look like I understand so she doesn't ask questions.

I'm sitting on the surface getting through the subject but not having a good understanding of what's going on.

I can't get past the brick wall to learn at the end of the day.

School experiences teach many students that learning is associated with anxiety and failure. Anxiety, Sizer and Sizer (1999) suggest, "drains energy, stifles thought, distracts" (p. 104). Deeper levels of thought and learning are difficult to achieve when momentous gaps in understanding exist and when motivation and self-belief wane. The drawing below seems to suggest that this student always

feels on the edge of failure. The life support system provides some hope but failure, like death, is always looming and inevitable.



(Lin, female student, year 9)

The emotions associated with anxiety and failing can be just as intense as those felt when learning is positive and optimal. On other occasions I have asked students to draw their learning in particular subject area contexts like English, Music or Science. Many students indicate that they have passions, clear learning preferences and that they have experienced deep thought and connection in particular learning contexts.

(Heidi, female student, year 9)

Csikszentmihalyi (1992) suggests that reading and writing are favourite 'flow' activities. This student is totally immersed in an experience in ways that are similar to the student for whom learning is a swirl. For both students, nothing else appears to matter but the intensity of the experience. The feelings associated with the learning experience overwhelm one's sense of being. In both images the student is small in the face of more significant and powerful forces; however, for the student in the forest of trees, the involvement is positive and akin to an experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Csikszentmihalyi (1992) uses the term 'flow' to describe optimal learning experiences where we challenge and expand ourselves and experience joy. 'Flow' experiences, he suggests, share some major components (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p. 48-67). Such experiences are personally challenging and require skill; they require complete absorption and concentration and consequently we lose ourselves and our sense of time when engaged in optimal experiences. The goals in such experiences are usually clear and feedback that is both internally and externally received is important. There is also a heightened sense of control: "what people enjoy is not the sense of being in control, but the sense of *exercising* control in difficult situations" (p. 61). The following positive statements linked to optimal learning experiences are included with drawings students have created:

I love guitar and I am prepared to go all the way with my skills. I want to challenge myself.

Science. I love it!!! I am a very big deep deep diver explorer.

In Art I like to search and search and dig deep for the right and best thing. I won't stop until I find it. Art unlike all the other subjects, is just for me, to please me!

I rock climb and when I do that it makes me feel free. I feel a sense of purpose. Climbing is my dream. I get a weird, nervous feeling when I do it. When I climb I can think clearly and come up with good ideas. Climbing gives everything a sense of purpose. If I feel I am slipping, I imagine I am doing my fav climb. It helps. It keeps me going.

When I am alone in bed I think deeply and explore new things and emotions. Sometimes it's bad because it makes me think of sad things.

In each of these statements there is a strong sense of personal control and purpose. Learning at this deep level involves the space and freedom for personal decision-making as well as a desire to inquire, pursue and extend. There is a clear sense that each of these students has high performance expectations and a keenness to be challenged in areas that are personally significant. They are strategic, open to imaginative possibilities, engaged in critical questioning and self aware. What inspires them to learn and think at this deeper level? What knowledge, skills and capacities do they draw upon and how are these further developed through ongoing experiences? What are the outcomes when learning is like this? What important roles do teachers play in helping to construct learning experiences like these? These are questions that teachers must consider if they are to work with students to create experiences that enable all students to learn at deeper, more meaningful levels at school. My interest in teacher professional learning stems

from questions like these about students. If teachers were able to learn deeply in the context of their work, what impact would it have on students' learning? What might deep learning be like for teachers; can it be described? What impact do learning experiences that are deeply challenging and meaning-full have on what teachers think and do?

It is suggested that two of the current key functions of teacher professional development is to "align teachers' practice with educational policies" and "to improve the learning outcomes of students by improving the performance of teachers" (Day & Sachs, 2004, p. 22). In an educational context where it can be argued a more managerial perspective dominates (Day & Sachs, 2004, p. 6), competency based standards, performance targets and measurable outcomes become the call of the day, as do, Smyth (1995) suggests, "surveillance and quality control procedures" (p. 2). In this context, Smyth (1995) contends, professional learning experiences that "celebrate and trumpet 'competency' and 'standards' approaches are very dangerous" (p. 7). Smyth (1995) suggests, amongst other things, that such approaches "deny the richly nuanced nature of teaching"; they "silence multiple voices and understandings"; they "fail to acknowledge the politics of inclusion and exclusion"; they "elevate particular viewpoints in the quest to designate what is important about teaching, without disclosing or acknowledging this"; and they "make teaching appear as if it is a complete, coherent and unified process, when in reality it is characterized by uncertainty, rupture, dissonance, tentativeness, provisionality and self-disclosure" (p. 7 - 8). Smyth (1995) argues with some urgency that multiple voices and other perspectives must be heard and adhered to (p. 8). This text is in many ways a

response to that call. It represents an alternative perspective to what Hoban (2002) calls “a mechanistic view of educational change” (p. 5) that “focuses on identifying independent components of educational knowledge and skills” (p. 21) without taking into “account the complex nature of teaching, teacher learning and the change process” (p. 21). It is a multi-voiced (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005) text in which I foreground the voices of students and teachers and the language they use to tell their own stories related to teaching and learning. My own reflexive voice is also dominant as I battle to develop personal understandings through the processes of research and writing and highlight for ethical reasons, my own subjectivities. It is a multi-layered text in which I draw attention to the relational nature of learning where connections as well as disconnections are central. Finally, it is intertextual in nature, where I experiment with multiple genres in order to consider the impact that form, format, voice and style have on the making of meaning in complex situations. This text is a call for change; a call as singer and songwriter Neil Young would say to “open up the tired eyes” and “see into the life of things” (Wordsworth, 1798)

What if I’d asked teachers to draw teaching?

I wonder what would have emerged if I had asked teachers to draw teaching; if I had asked the teachers of these students to draw what they think they are doing in classrooms. I have asked groups of teachers to draw learning. I have placed their drawings on the floor alongside the drawings of their students and with them examined the similarities and differences. A number of common themes emerge in the teacher drawings. Many teachers use metaphors of growth to depict the impact of personal learning experiences. They draw plants sprouting, branches

stretching out and root systems reaching deeper. They draw explosive abstract depictions of colour where there is movement, connection and profound experience. They draw images that show sequential development and increasing levels of challenge where learning is a step-by-step process like climbing a ladder or clambering over blocks that stand increasingly taller. They draw jigsaw puzzles where they indicate that learning is a holistic process of making connections between disparate pieces. Teachers, on the whole have positive and profound conceptions of learning and perhaps that is why many choose to teach. I wonder: would they depict their professional learning experiences in similar ways?

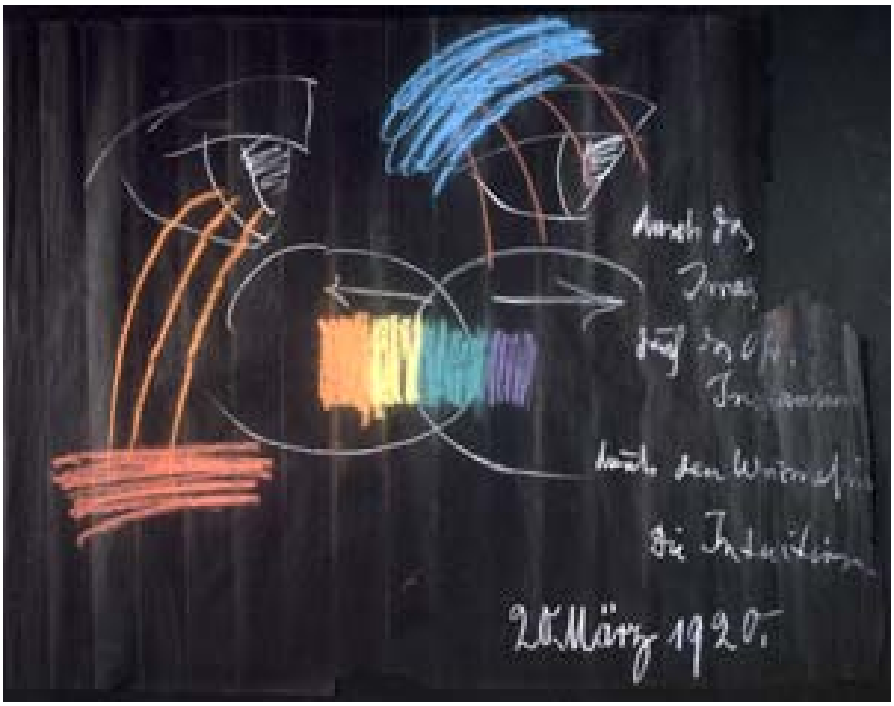
Students and teachers spend a lot of time watching one another in the school context. Their perceptions are coloured by personal subjectivities and powerful conceptual understandings that influence thoughts and action. We watch behaviour in schools and make hasty, mechanical judgments that lead to damaging sorting, sifting and shoving practices (Sizer and Sizer, 1999). We look at statistical data in schools and make simple judgments about what is taking place in classrooms and what needs to be done to improve. We often watch without looking deeply into the life of things. Seidel (1998), who writes about the need to look closely at students' writing, suggests that "seeing is the result of deliberate work: noticing, considering, comparing, and wondering. It is serious cognitive activity, demanding full attention and engagement" (p. 70). Looking closely, noticing and describing are essential components of the inquiry process. In the research projects that follow, I take a "descriptive stance" (Swartz, Martin & Woolf, 2000): "staying close and caring, attending to the complexity and

ambiguity of lived experience" (Swartz, Martin & Woolf, 2000, p. 136). A descriptive stance allows me to hear the voices of others as well as my own and see the possibilities that lie there.

Inviting students to draw learning is an effective way to tap into the voices and experiences that are frequently marginalized in the dialogue surrounding teaching and learning at school. It is there in the provocative, authentic, deeply engaging images created by young people that we are confronted with some troubling realities. How far have we really come in our efforts to 'transform' secondary schools through innovation (Hargreaves, 2003)? In the debates about whether we should 'improve' or 'transform' schooling and what 'levers' and 'drivers' (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 22) should be manipulated for maximum impact, the nature of learning seems to be a forgotten factor. Perhaps it is there in the fresh, rich imagery created by young people that we can find new metaphors to guide us into the future of learning and teaching in schools. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) powerfully suggest, "New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities (p. 235). What if school were an exploding planet, a journey in a dark forest, a rock climb or an archaeological dig as some students suggest it can be. The students' drawings are powerful reminders of the vulnerable, robust, searching, open minds of young people. They are heartfelt and tap into real emotions and experiences. As educators it is crucial that we act upon what students have to say and that we involve them in the processes of reshaping what will become. A people-centered approach involves respectfully looking, listening, and dwelling upon what we see and hear. And then finding ways to take action together.

Chapter Three

An expanded concept of research



Rudolf Steiner

Imagination – Inspiration – Intuition (1920)

Chalk on black paper

70 x 114cm

(Steiner's drawings are in the public domain and permission to use this image is not required)

Context: The blackboard drawings of Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (January, 2008)
Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition

I am not thinking about research as I walk along St Kilda Road with my family on our way to the National Art Gallery of Victoria. The weather is hot and the plane trees that line the road like ghostly guardians are parched and in need of water. We enter the coolness of the gallery with few expectations. Works from the UBS art collection are on display. My 10 year old daughter and I examine a large photograph by German artist Andreas Gursky titled *99 Cent* (1999). The image is of supermarket aisles taken from an aerial perspective. We talk about what we can see. We decide that this is definitely not an Australian supermarket and then we look for all the signs that suggest that the context is probably America. We examine a painting by Francesco Clemente titled *Perseverance* (1981). A naked male figure holds an ancient Greek building and pooh falls from the sky. We do not realise that the heavy brown dollops of paint are intended to be pooh until we read the small placard next to the painting. My daughter laughs and laughs. What a strange thing. We are both surprised and yet we love the idea of pooh falling from the sky and we talk about it for the rest of the day.

I am not thinking about research when we enter another section of the gallery and are faced with the blackboard drawings of Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner. This is an exhibition that has taken years to bring to Melbourne. I wonder why we have not heard about it. I know a little about Joseph Beuys and his concept of social sculpture. Beuys saw an inextricable link between art, politics, economics

and philosophy. For Beuys art was a means to perceive differently and connect deeply with both the inner and outer worlds. He believed that profound connections made through thinking and action, lead to personal transformation and social change. Beuys argued for a system of living based truly on freedom, equality and solidarity and for a new focus on concepts. He called for a 'revolution of concepts' and 'non-violent transformation'. Interestingly, Beuys placed an emphasis on thinking and self-reflection. In 1982 he wrote: "Before we ask WHAT CAN WE DO? we have to first consider the question HOW MUST WE THINK?" (p. 92). This focus on active processes to think deeply and freely in order to learn and create change resonates with my own concerns and interests. Beuys is also famous for the iconic hat he wears. When I think about Beuys, I have a visual picture in my mind's eye of Beuys wearing a felt hat.

As an educator, I also know something about the work of Rudolf Steiner. I associate Steiner with an ongoing movement in education that values individualised learning. I have been interested for some time in certain practices used in Steiner Schools where teachers teach the same class for up to seven years; where subjects are taught in intensive, longer blocks of time; where an intrinsic interest in learning is promoted; and where moral values and artistic processes are intrinsically intertwined with everyday work. I know too that Steiner's ideas laid the groundwork for biodynamic agriculture. Our stumbling upon this exhibition opened up a fresh layer of rich connections that enabled me to take my thinking further. As I viewed the images I began to think about learning and how we capture thought. I thought about school learning. And I started to think about research.

Thinking, learning and research as sculptural processes

In the centre of the gallery space blackboards amass haphazardly and around the walls are visual representations of thinking in chalk on blackboards. I am struck by the blackboards and their visual beauty. In contemporary classrooms we have largely disbanded with blackboards. They have been replaced by cleaner, dustless, brighter white boards and in many classrooms, by interactive whiteboards that allow you to manipulate, interact and copy in ways that would blow the mind of Rudolph Steiner. I think again about the images drawn by students (discussed in Chapter Two) and the austere presence of black/white boards and the teachers standing before them. The object has come to represent authority – the authority of knowledge, teacher and of acceptable behaviour. The blackboard dictates seating arrangements, perception, interaction and language use. For many years it has been a powerful medium through which dominant forms of knowledge are communicated. It has come to represent control and in many circumstances fixes and confines thinking. But not here. In this context the blackboards enable and display creative, exploratory thinking that is inquiring, hesitant and transforming. In his lectures between 1919 and 1924, Steiner used chalk and black paper to sketch and communicate his theories. There is a creative energy in these pieces represented by tentative lines, contrasting colours, bold marks, smudges, key concepts and direction lines. Some years later (1974 - 1977) Beuys, clearly inspired by Steiner used blackboards in a similar way to capture thought, to shape ideas and to transform. Beuys, however, in line with his views about collaborative and social processes, used the blackboards to

capture ideas that emerged through dialogue with members of the public. Nicholson (2007) suggests the blackboards contain "residues" or "traces" of a process of exchange, of hundreds of people speaking, thinking, listening over many weeks (p. 73). I think about the intricate geological process of sedimentation where traces from actual moments are captured, fixed and gently shaped through the elements. Rock, in its solid state, is really a collection of traces, frozen moments in time that come together in haphazard circumstances to form something real and striking. I begin to think about my research stories as traces of experience that I can explore and animate through writing.

Nicholson (2007) refers to Merewether (1999) who has written about the "paradoxical condition" (p. 165) of the trace. The blackboard pieces are *traces* of conceptual thinking produced socially in the past so they are retrospective; but they are also transformative of our understanding here in the present and potentially can impact on future action. Nicholson (2007) suggests: "The retrospective and the prospective, the residual and the potential, are tightly bound together" (p. 74). Traces are partial yet powerful marks that capture something interesting within rich and complicated experiences. They are evidence, and significant in their relation to other traces. Together traces create a feisty dialogue. They can be read, heard and understood in ways that can change thinking and even influence behaviour. The trace is similar in some ways to Green's (2002) notion of a 'slice' or 'snapshot'. According to Green (2002) the term 'slice' in relation to research emphasises that representations of life while being partial, are "not random or lacking coherence" (p. vii). I would suggest that capturing, entering and examining traces of experience through story is

worthy activity for a researcher, particularly for an educational researcher trying to understand the complex human lifeworld (van Manen, 1990) of schooling. I begin to see research as a sculptural process, as a bringing together of elements in both a contrived and spontaneous way to create something provocative and meaning-full. As I write this chapter I carve away unwanted material to create a form while I also build on the form by adding new elements. I am making and modelling something that is heavy with layers.

For both Beuys and Steiner the blackboards were not only teaching aids but they worked as Sacks (2007a) suggests, as "portals to the territory of active imaginal work" (p. 38) and as an alternative to rational, linear ways of perceiving, explaining and knowing. Here was a space where connections could be made collaboratively and represented creatively, fluidly, sensitively. In her essay on the blackboard work Sacks (2007a) strikes a chord with my own forming ideas about how I would like to engage in research processes and present my understandings. She writes:

> I have learned over the years what an astonishing process it is to enter a proposal imaginatively, in a participatory way, instead of arguing, analysing or trying to persuade. Not only do we get a deeper sense of the proposal, but it also helps us make choices, stops us from being caught in the yes/no binary oppositions that appear whenever there is a major decision to be made, the yes/no state that is embodied in Beuys' durational sound work *Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee,* 1969. This process of entering deeply into the proposals, which is a process of co-operative enquiry, of negotiation and exchange, is what Beuys describes as the 'permanent conference' (p. 42).

There are two notions here that extend my thoughts and practices related to research. The first is the idea of entering into research imaginatively as an active participant who explores freely and who is open to ambiguity and play. This view stands in contrast to the positivist paradigm that Guba and Lincoln (1994) examine where neutral reality and 'truths' are assumed to exist and "context-free generalisations" (p. 109) can be made by "independent entities" (p. 110). I am challenged to find other ways of entering the research process, of exploring possibilities that lie in the research experience and of constructing research texts that more authentically represent our journeys.

The second interesting notion suggested by Sacks (2007a) in her discussion of Beuys' work is that of 'permanent conference,' the idea that thinking, learning and change occurs when we direct our energies toward particular goals in ongoing collaborations that include multiple voices. While the research projects discussed in this doctorate can be described as 'permanent conferences' at work, I see the research process itself as a conference of voices interacting, jostling to create meaning; a process that has no clear beginning or end. There are multiple voices participating in the chatter that are internal and external, authoritative and theoretical as well as uncertain and personal. Visiting the exhibition of Bueys' and Steiner's blackboards had me thinking about research when I least expected to.

Meeting myself in research: an autoethnographic stance

This is, in the most general sense, an ethnographic study. Ellis (2004) suggests that ethnography "means writing about or describing people and culture, using firsthand observation and participation in a setting or situation" (p. 26). Neumann (1996) writes that historically ethnographers "searched for unities in the midst of experiential difference" (p. 175) and were influenced by the "controlling motives and values of Western culture" (p. 176). Ethnography in its contemporary guise has become more diverse and open as a methodology so that the 'Other' that was once the subject of research now writes for themselves (Neumann, 1996, p. 182) and the conventional notions of 'field' have "become obscured by an incessant remaking of modern cultural geographies" (Neumann, 1996, p. 182). In times of uncertainty, it has been suggested (Neumann, 1996; Braudy, 1982), we search for coherence. Storytelling and autobiographical writing enable researchers to examine personal and social identities and construct unity amidst cultural disjuncture.

Neumann (1996) believes that the term autoethnography is the "meeting place for the inward and outward gazes of cultural observation" (p. 188). Autoethnography, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest, is a "new writing form" (p. 101) in the interpretivist realm that allows us to consider subjectivity and cultural experience. For Pratt (1991) autoethnographic texts confront dominant forms of power that have marginalised certain individuals and prevented them from telling their own stories. Ellis (2004) contends that feminism and the need to include the Other's voice have played a pivotal role in the narrative and

autoethnography movement. Richardson (1997) who sees writing as a process of discovery was troubled by the ethical issues associated with writing about others. She was also troubled by the dominant practices associated with being an academic in a university.

> My engagement with the theoretical concepts of feminist poststructualism – reflexivity, authority, authorship, subjectivity, power, language, ethics, representation – led me to question the grounds of my own authority and the ethics of my own practices as a sociologist. I could no longer write in science's omniscient 'voice from nowhere'. (p. 2-3).

Writing "critical ethnographies of the self" (Richardson, 1997, p. 2) allows Richardson to 'study' herself and her social and cultural situation as a sociologist, academic and woman. She uses alternative forms of representation to do this: drama, poetry, performance pieces as well as essays. Richardson (1994) argues that there is no single way to stage a text; that we work with material "like wet clay, it is there for us to shape" (p. 523). The freedom that is now permitted to experiment with form and voice in research texts is seen as a legitimate response to a crisis of representation (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994; Richardson, 1997; Eisner, 1998; Ellis, 2004). Lincoln and Denzin (1994) suggest that experimentation will continue to proliferate and that we will battle in ongoing ways with the tensions that exist between our concerns for validity and authenticity and our understanding that all texts are socially, politically, historically and culturally situated (p. 582).

Freeman (2007) examines the connections between autobiography and narrative inquiry. He writes about Gusdorf's seminal essay (1956) on the nature of autobiography. Gusdorf says that "second readings of experience" are truer and more revealing than the initial experience because when reflecting we establish an "aerial view" and see in experience inherent meanings. As Freeman (2007) suggests: "Realisations, narrative connections, are made after the fact, when the dust has settled" (p. 132). Insight and understanding comes later; it is a delayed effect. When afterwards, we examine the deposits of our experience, the traces left behind in memory, we see that they are not at all disconnected fragments as we once thought, but that traces can work together to create a picture, something beautiful and unique like a fossilised insect.

I think again about the blackboards and the intense response I had to seeing them for the first time. Were the blackboards evoking in some way layers of memory and associations? As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, we meet ourselves in our inquiries. The blackboards take me to memories of classrooms that are embedded vividly there in my mind. I see Reggie Robinson in grade two standing rigidly in fear with his nose on the blackboard and Mr. Jorgenson ready to throw a white-caked duster at his back. I remember the list of names drawn beautifully in a corner of the blackboard in grade three and mine at the bottom. I remember the essay topic about Freud and libido written quizzically by my year 9 English teacher in thick white chalk and being taken by that topic into a world I had no idea existed. I remember when I first began to teach, the uncomfortable crusty feeling of dust on my fingers. In this 'permanent conference' my personal

voice is an integral part of the narrative helping me to make sense of the "research puzzles" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) that emerge.

Research methodology and layers of influence: working within and beyond the landscape

I am standing before my bookshelf holding a book I have not looked at in years. Gerald Murnane is an Australian writer. He grew up in Bendigo, a regional town in Victoria and he moved to Melbourne at some point (I wonder where he is now). Murnane refused to travel outside of the state of Victoria; he would not venture past the northern border just above Bendigo. He writes about place, about landscapes and the people who inhabit those spaces. Murnane is a close observer of Australian culture; he observes his own life and those who live around him. I remember being fascinated by his refusal to travel, of wanting to stay within a confined area and of wanting to know a place well; of wanting to capture the heart of a place and also its possibilities. One of the things I like about Murnane's work is its familiarity. The physical landscapes are places I know well and have lived in. The writing encourages me, as an active reader, to remember and revisit the physical and emotional landscapes of my own youth and to know and feel these places afresh and more intimately. Set against the dimly lit terrace houses of Carlton, the grandstand at Caulfield race course or the shores at St. Kilda beach are the dreams, relationships and struggles of ordinary people. The physical landscape and the emotional lives of people and their imaginings are intertwined so that each reflects the other. Murnane's writing is

also a complex interweaving of autobiography and fiction. His novels are set in places he knows well; he draws intimately from personal experiences and interactions; his own ironic wit and obsessions influence the development of characters and plotlines; and his own take on Australian maleness influenced by growing up in the 1950s are all elements clearly present in his work. Yet his stories go beyond the everyday into areas that are less tangible. When he looks at the "walls or drapes or tree-trunks" (Murnane, 1987, p. 5) in the background, he is looking for a gap, an opening, "a place beyond the crudely imagined dreamlands of the average man" (Murnane, 1987, p. 5). It is interesting to me that fiction opens up the mind to imaginative possibilities and new ideas more effectively than most forms of educational research. It is through fiction that I see, through the "gaps among the foliage" (Murnane, 1987, p. 5), possibilities for doing things differently and I yearn for educational research to do the same.

As an educational researcher, Maxine Greene uses literature to help her to examine ideas and see them anew. Greene (1978) suggests literature makes it "possible for us to come in contact with ourselves, to recover a lost spontaneity. This is because, in order to enter into the illusioned world of the novel (or the short story or the poem), we must break with the mundane and the taken-for-granted" (p. 2). Literature and art more generally allow us to enter an "imaginary mode of awareness" (Greene, 1978, p. 2). Greene (1978) writes about the importance of being aware and self-conscious and how as educators we must avoid passivity and work in a state of 'wide awakeness' (p. 2). She, like Murnane, uses the term 'landscape' to refer to peoples' personal histories, "their lived lives" (Greene, 1978, p. 2) and perceived realities. She argues that "to be in

touch with our landscapes is to be conscious of our evolving experiences, to be aware of the ways in which we encounter our world" (Greene, 1978, p. 2).

As I flick through the pages of Murnane's novel *Landscape with Landscape* (1987), I come across an episode where the narrator reflects on his decision to become a teacher. I smile as I read this passage probably because it touches upon an Australian sensibility that is the basis of much of our humour: a casualness bordering on disregard. When I reread the passage, I think again.

> At the age of twenty-one I enrolled in a course that would qualify me, after one year, as a primary teacher. Teaching as a job did not interest me; I wanted to get away from Melbourne and into a new landscape. All through my course I studied lists of remote schools and large-scale maps of Victoria and tried to decide where I would spend the forty years of my teaching career. I thought of my future as a series of not days but late afternoons. I had begun to drink daily before I left the Public Service, and I had found that a certain amount of beer could usually set my glands working. Now I planned that for forty years as a teacher I would drink every afternoon between four and six o'clock with stolid working-men in a small town whose tree-lined main street trailed away into gently undulating grasslands. I would eat alone at a table reserved for me in the local café and then walk through the dusk to my lodgings – a self-contained bungalow behind the house of a silent elderly couple. In the bungalow I would sip more beer and write at my desk. The people in the town would suppose I was preparing lessons or simply reading. But I would be at my lifelong task of writing poetry. And every few years a volume of my poems would be published under a pseudonym and well praised (p. 151).

Clearly a teacher like the one imagined, could not be described as "wide awake." There is a clear sense that as a teacher the narrator would be accepting, passive, alienated and would probably operate in routined, habitual, convenient ways.

There is little drive or purpose to be anything else. Alternatively, all creative thought and energy would go into the act of writing poetry after work hours. I wonder why being a teacher and being a poet are regarded as opposing pursuits. What would happen if the narrator as teacher designed 'lessons' as he might write poetry? Why wouldn't he consider that opening up the minds of young people to creative thinking, might be as worthwhile as composing and publishing poetry? Why would he think that the profession of teaching in comparison to writing had less to offer in terms of personal fulfilment and recognition? Greene (1978) is right when she places an emphasis on the important role that literature and art can play in helping us to think well, question expectations and see things from diverse perspectives. When we make rich connections and find coherence where we thought there was none, we rejoice, make meaning and learn.

I wonder as I stand at the bookshelf: are writers like Murnane researchers? And, how is what I do as a researcher different and the same as what Murnane does as a writer?

Murnane, as a writer, is interested (I assume) in exploring culture and the construction of self through the process of writing creatively. I imagine he is intrigued and curious about the world in which he lives and probably more interested in the things that are ambiguous, difficult, contradictory, heart-warming, silly and unfair. I imagine that he takes things in: his landscape, conversations, images, slices of experience; sometimes unconsciously, sometimes making precise notes. I imagine he is interested in developing insight and understanding but that he rarely feels like he has it firmly in his grasp. I imagine

him engaging in a process of selecting and highlighting, of drawing out themes, and ideas and making connections between disparate events in order to learn. I imagine he loves the process of writing even though it is often difficult. He loves to get inside something through writing. He likes to skirt around the edges and imply and play without being too obvious and invite the reader to respond by making connections to her own rich life world. I imagine that he likes to find the right word or phrase but sometimes is frustrated because the words are not there to describe the complexity of his idea or his experience. He finds it difficult to receive feedback but he knows how important it is to seek a critical response from someone who cares about your work. Murnane is a writer. So too am I. We are writers in the same way. Writing makes us 'wide-awake' (Greene, 1978), 'alive' (Dewey, 1933) and 'present' (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). Writing as a process is a central and influential element in the process of research. It allows us to travel while searching (Linds, 2008). Murnane and I use writing as a vehicle to help us to enter into and understand the worlds we inhabit. I draw upon narrative devices, observation and imaginative thinking, as he does, because they enable me to make and share meaning as well as disrupt that which seems familiar; but my central purpose is likely to be different to Murnane's and so I also draw upon academic discourse and its expository form to communicate.

In education an academic discourse, Goodman (1998) suggests, is largely expected to follow the conventions of expository prose (p. 54). Goodman (1998) explains that academic discourse is informed, reviewed and public (p. 54). It is also pragmatic. It needs to contribute something useful, beneficial and important. It needs to be intellectually honest and authentic. It needs to be fair and

respectful of those whose stories are included. In my view, educational research must be 'good work' (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001) and be driven by moral purpose (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006). Goodman (1998) sees that the purpose of his research is pedagogical. He writes: "Similar to other forms of teaching, my goal is to share information in ways that stimulate others to reflect, to think, and to generate and share their own knowledge" (p. 55). I too have pragmatic concerns. I want to spur my readers to act, share, debate, rethink. I like Goodman's notion of research as pedagogical. It fits perfectively with an educational perspective.

What is research?

All depends upon a breaking free, a leap, and then a question. (Greene, 1995, p.6)

Defining terms can be problematic, particularly terms that are heavily contested and layered with meanings that shift according to who is doing the defining, the situational and historical context, and the nature of what is being defined. Stenhouse (1975) defined the term 'research' as any "systematic, critical and self-critical inquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge" (p. 156). In its broad sense research is inquiry, a search for understanding, a method for finding out. Based on this pursuit there is also the construction of a text which is how 'knowledge' is developed and shared with others. Vidich and Lyman (1994) suggest that the research task "requires both the act of observation and the act of communicating the analysis of these observations to others" (p. 24). While this may sound relatively simple, these processes and their

interrelationship are complex and difficult. I like to think of research as an opportunity: an opportunity to transcend our everyday consciousness and taken-for-granted routines; a process that demands we be "wide-awake" (Greene, 1978). Research is also a privilege. To take the experiences and words of others and to shape them in some way is a process that must be undertaken with great care and respect. While Greene (1995) in the quote at the beginning of this section was writing about the process of learning, research too is about asking 'why' and engaging in questioning that takes us deep into ourselves and beyond. Greene (1995) suggests that this way of thinking depends on our capacity to 'break free.' I wonder about this notion and its relationship to research expectations in higher education (and I expect in other fields too). I consider Stenhouse's (1975) reference to 'systematic' inquiry and think again about the freedom required to enter a topic imaginatively. Just how free am I to work within and beyond the traditional landscape constructed and tamed over many years by dominant research epistemologies? I am trying to be free in the hope that I leap further, but how possible is this, and how risky? In the chapters that follow I enter research contexts in imaginative, participatory ways, yet I also aim to be honest and true to the voices represented so that what emerges is fair and useful.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) there are two types of research: qualitative and quantitative research. They contrast the two in the following statement:

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry. They

> seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasise the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Inquiry is purported to be within a value-free framework (p. 4).

This study is most certainly qualitative research that sits within an interpretivist theoretical perspective. I wonder why I am drawn to research of this nature. I know that part of me is attracted to the clear, sharp messages inherent in some quantitative research studies, the capturing of something difficult in a nutshell. Hattie's work (2003) is an example of this. His meta-analysis of 50,000 research studies that examine factors that make a difference to students' learning is thought provoking and provides a clear and focused lens through which to examine teaching and learning practices. School leaders are particularly interested in his list of factors that make a difference, particularly those in the top ten. In busy, anxious times, authoritative lists produced by experts have great appeal. I ask myself, why aren't I engaging in that sort of research? Could it have something to do with personal thinking and learning preferences? I have worked with Julia Atkin in the past and her use of the four quadrant model of brain processing developed by Herrmann (1989) has helped me to reflect on my own thinking preferences and the impact on my teaching and learning. I know that I prefer to think holistically and conceptually, that I like to imagine and play with ideas; that I much prefer to interact with people than work solely on my own. I know that I feel things first. My responses are often emotional ones. When I think about the importance of education making a positive difference to society, I am inspired and moved to act because of the life stories of people I meet and read about. I am less inclined to want structure and rules and I sometimes rebel

against predetermined structures that are imposed on me. I have worked my way into a corner of the education profession that allows me to do what I love: interact with people daily, engage in conceptual thinking, initiate innovations and read and write. That is not to say that I do not collect and value quantitative data, in fact in my work with schools and in my current position as coordinator of a university course, I look closely at statistical data for evaluation and development purposes. Figures, however, while useful, always leave me feeling undernourished, dissatisfied and wanting more.

Paying attention to the personal disposition of the researcher is important. Willis and Smith (2000) suggest that the people we are, in essence our 'being' shapes what we see – "what counts as real and important" (Willis & Smith, 2000, p. 11). They suggest that research as a purposive human endeavour is not only about intellectual inquiry but also less obviously about human desires and emotions (Willis & Smith, 2000, p. 10). They refer to this as the 'heart' of the researcher: "a metaphor referring to peoples' affective predispositions which inclines them to pre-value or to pre-reject the worth and validity of various experiences" (p. 10). My personal dispositions lead me to value certain experiences above others; to find meaning where others may not; to disregard something that another might find crucial. My disposition shapes, at times unknowingly, the choices I make during this research journey.

I wonder about the interplay between internal dispositions and external paradigms. I have been immersed now (by choice) for so long in certain disciplines, in certain ways of thinking and knowing, that I wonder about the extent to which I

am made. I always loved English as a subject at school. It gave me the opportunity to explore different worlds through reading and to examine my own world through writing. I was always inspired by my English teachers: they were the sort of people that I wanted to be like and I got to know them personally. The subject was continually slipping out of school and into my real world. Maths, on the other hand was like a foreign language to me, "a different kind of story" (Richardson, 1994). I was anxious during arithmetic tests, unclear about the connections between one lesson and another and the text book was impersonal and required me to complete one question before I could move onto the next. It was full of rules and certainties and eventually I decided I did not want to play the game and failed in my senior year. Through the discipline of English I learned to be me. Maths as a discipline told me who I was not. And so my sense of identity was developed through these dominant ways of thinking about and understanding the world.

The socio-cultural world I learned within was also influential. I grew up in a low socio-economic suburban area that was also multicultural. I was aware from a young age that people lived very different lives and that some families struggled. I grew up with conversations about politics, particularly at school where all my youthful teachers openly supported Australia's Labor Party. Issues related to justice, multiculturalism and feminism were frequently discussed at my secondary school and so my transition to university where these conversations deepened, seemed natural. My university course where I majored in Literature, introduced me to postmodernism, deconstruction and reader response theory. I

was encouraged to write creative and resistant responses to texts and later, as an English teacher my practice was framed by these theories.

In secondary school I became interested in art history, theory and practice and also in music. Many of the friends I made throughout my schooling were artists of some sort and I eventually married a visual artist. We have always had an interest in alternative music and frequently see live performances. The music I listen to encourages me to experiment, appreciate non-linear thinking and to revel at the interconnections between visual images, sound, lyric and emotion. The conversations, experiences and texts that continue to shape my life direct me to think, feel and seek meaning in certain ways. For me, the research methodologies that I choose are linked inherently to the person I am and to the way I have learned to perceive the world.

As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest, each research tradition is governed by different genres and methodological approaches.

> Qualitative researchers use ethnographic prose, historical narratives, first person accounts, still photographs, life histories, fictionalised facts, and biographical and autobiographical materials, among others. Quantitative researchers use mathematical models, statistical tables, and graphs, and often write about their research in impersonal, third-person prose (p. 6).

I learned at school which genres enabled me to develop meaning and which genres I could achieve success within. As a "socially situated researcher" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 12), I enter the world of research influenced by both

my personal history and the theoretical paradigms that have developed over time in my field. While qualitative research seems to be a more natural fit for me given my personal and professional experiences, I realise that the landscape I work within is highly contested, political and that the boundaries are blurred rather than distinct. Given that I have shared some of my personal history, I will now move into a more expository mode and construct a brief history of the research context that I work within using the work of Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Guba and Lincoln (1994), Vidich and Lyman (1994), Crotty (1998) and Pring (2000).

Positivism, a philosophical position that is chiefly quantitative in nature, "seems to refer to those accounts, which study systematically what is clear, factual and open to observation" (Pring, 2000, p. 90). This perspective can be traced back to the Age of Reason that began in England in the seventeenth century and later flourished in France. According to Pring (2000), this tradition "distrusted knowledge-claims which went beyond what was accessible to observation. It distrusted and rejected, therefore, philosophical and religious beliefs which gave a non-empirical account of the world" (p. 90). The positivist perspective, according to Denzin & Lincoln (1994) argued that "there is a reality out there to be studied" (p. 5). Most influential in recent times, was the Vienna Circle which came into prominence in the 1920s. According to Crotty (1998), the Vienna Circle, that gave birth to logical positivism, "was seeking to introduce the methods and exactitude of mathematics to the study of philosophy" (p. 24) and saw that knowledge could only be developed through scientific investigation. Wittgenstein became an important influence on the group's ideas. It was

Wittgenstein who, in his early work, came up with the 'verification principle': the notion that "no statement is meaningful unless it is capable of being verified" (Crotty, 1998, p. 25). According to Crotty (1998), the logical positivists believed that statements could be verified in two ways. A statement could be verified when it spelt out "what is already contained or not contained in the definition of the subject" (p. 25). The example Crotty uses is 'A doe is a female deer'. Alternatively, 'A doe is not a male deer' would also be verifiable. Such statements are generally accepted as being true and non-contentious and are based on logical assumptions and conventions developed through science and language. The logical positivists, according to Crotty (1998) were more interested in 'synthetic' statements where something new and less clear-cut is introduced.

> Synthetic propositions are verified by experience – and only by experience. Experience? Here too logical positivism is quite definite. Experience means sense-data. What we experience through our senses (immediately, or by way of the instruments of science that extend the operation of our senses) is verified knowledge. The knowledge is 'factual' – and facts are what logical positivism is concerned with before all and above all (Crotty, 1998, p. 25).

According to Pring (2000, p. 91) statements like 'God is omnipotent' or 'We ought to pursue the general good of society' were not considered by the group to be statements at all because they could not be verified through experience. Statements that can be verified through experience and empirical investigation, explains Pring (2000) "give rise to generalisations and law-like statements which are predictive of further experiences in similar circumstances" (p. 92). According

to Pring (2000), one of the best translations of positivism into educational research was by D. J. O'Connor (1956) who argued that we needed to distinguish between statements that outline the aims of education and which reflect values and emotion, and statements that can be scientifically verified as either true or false. Such views affirm research practices that focus on the gathering of statistical data, that conform to rigid standards and expectations and that create unequivocal, simplified statements or remedies. While there is clearly an important place for such research and our understandings are enriched through such studies, an over-reliance on and preference for such approaches and an adherence to research findings produced through narrowly determined methods, can only lead, I believe, to impoverished understandings.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) point to a number of implicit problems in such approaches to research. Quantitative research, because it focuses on creating generalisations and verifiable statements, "strips from consideration" (p. 106) other variables that exist in specific contexts and therefore have no meaning to individual lives. They suggest that meaning and purpose "attached by human actors to their activities" (p. 106) are excluded and that 'grand theories' do not account for the lives of those who are outside of the dominant culture. Guba and Lincoln (1994) also argue that the scientific method of proving proposed hypotheses excludes the process of discovery. They suggest that those who propose alternative paradigms challenge the very foundations of traditional, positivist research. Qualitative researchers, they suggest, argue that "facts are facts only within some theoretical framework" (p. 107). These researchers, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that 'facts' are value-laden and

consequently the notion that real truth exists must be questioned. Qualitative researchers, Guba and Lincoln (1994) contend, would also argue that the relationship between the researcher and subject is an interactive one and that the inquirer, rather than observing objectively, always overlays their own subjectivities.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994), in their attempt to capture the development of qualitative research during the twentieth century, refer to 'Five Moments of Qualitative Research': the Traditional Period, the Modernist Phase, Blurred Genres, Crisis of Representation and The Fifth Moment. While these 'moments' imply a linear, sequential development, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the journey "is defined more by breaks and ruptures than by clear evolutionary, progressive movement from one stage to the next" (p. 575). They also suggest that what unites researchers who have worked in and been influenced by these 'moments' is a "humanistic commitment …. to study the world always from the perspective of the interacting individual…They all share the belief that a politics of liberation must always begin with the perspectives, desires, and dreams of those individuals and groups who have been oppressed by the larger ideological, economic, and political forces of a society, or a historical moment" (p. 575). Hearing and representing the voices of those who have traditionally been marginalised and silenced is a central concern in qualitative research.

During the Traditional Period which extends from the early 1900s to the present day, field-workers or ethnographers, wrote at length about their experiences. Their note-taking, regarded as objective accounts led to the formation of

generalisations and law-like statements about the people and lives they were studying. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) these classical ethnographers had "a commitment to objectivism, a complicity with imperialism, a belief in monumentalism (the ethnography would create a museumlike picture of the culture studied), and a belief in timelessness (what was studied never changed)" (p. 7). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) also place the ethnographic work arising from the University of Chicago during this period. According to Vidich and Lyman (1994) William Foote Whyte designed a formal research project into his life experiences as an Italian living in the ghettos of Boston and called it 'participant observation'. The Anthropology Department at the University of Chicago, "informed by a qualitative orientation" (Vidich and Lyman, 1994, p. 34), allowed Whyte to report on his unique research which presented "his data from the perspective of his relationships with his subjects" (Vidich and Lyman, 1994, p. 34). Vidich and Lyman (1994) suggest that "Whyte is as much a researcher as he is a subject in his own book" (p. 34). Such research experiences paved the way for grounded research theories and naturalistic inquiries.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) this 'moment' was followed by a Modernist Phase where 'slices of life' and social realism were valued. A new generation of researchers were drawn to "qualitative research practices that would let them give voice to society's underclass" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 8). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that qualitative researchers during this 'golden age' were "imbued with Promethean human powers, they valorised villains and outsiders as heroes to mainstream society. They embodied a belief in the contingency of self and society, and held to emancipatory ideals for which

'one lives and dies'" (p. 9). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that this period came abruptly to an end in the late 1960s with the advent of the Vietnam War and with a new 'moment' came recognition of diverse approaches.

This third 'moment' is referred to by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as 'Blurred Genres.' Researchers now had a range of paradigms and methodologies at their disposal and naturalistic, post positivist and constructionist paradigms gained credibility during this period. While diverse ways of collecting and analysing data become more prevalent, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that "the politics and ethics of qualitative research were topics of considerable concern" (p. 9). Boundaries between research methodologies were blurring and according to Denzin & Lincoln (1994) were "giving way to a more pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended perspective" (p. 9).

The fourth moment or what Denzin and Lincoln (1994) refer to as the Crisis of Representation began they believe in the mid-1980s. In this period they argue, researchers continue to question old methodologies and notions of truth and critical and feminist epistemologies become more dominant. Researchers, they suggest, pose questions like: "Can we ever hope to speak authentically of the experience of the Other, or an Other? And if not, how can we create a social science that includes the Other?" (p. 577). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), in this moment interpretive theories take precedence as researchers experiment and subvert old conventions. Writing is understood as a method of inquiry and researchers through self-reflexivity draw explicit attention to the problematic nature of the role they play as researchers.

The fifth moment, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) is what we are in now and represents a more expanded notion of research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue, "We are in a new age where messy, uncertain, multi-voiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation" (p. 15). This moment is fraught with tension and difficulties associated with the impact of the researcher's personal subjectivities, the situated, contextual nature of research and the notion that meaning is always plural and political (Bruner, 1993). Researchers like Richardson (1994), who are excited by the new possibilities that these tensions create, contend that "we are fortunate, now, to be working in a postmodern climate" (p. 517) because rigid disciplinary boundaries are being broken down and a new freedom is possible. She writes,

> The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But postmodernism does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. Rather, it opens those standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods, which are also, then, subject to critique (p. 517-518).

Researchers are finding new ways to deal with the vexed questions that surround the crisis of representation. Collaborative research, where "researchers and their subjects are on the same critical plane" (Stanley, 1990, p. 9); where researchers and their subjects work together to conduct research, to critically reflect on

research processes and to jointly construct texts is an approach that seeks to be more equalitarian, reciprocal and focused on awareness raising.

Autobiographical approaches can foreground the intersection between the personal and the socio-cultural. Usher (2002) suggests that, "It is this combination of the unique and the common that gives autobiography its particular strength and provides the researcher with a rich field of data that might not be provided using more conventional methods" (p. 94). Usher (2002) argues that there is "the need for many stories" (p. 94) and that in sharing personal stories, common themes and reference points emerge. Other narrative representations of the self, where the researcher aims to capture lived experience and evoke emotional responses (Richardson, 1994) are emerging in the wake of postmodern and feminist critiques of traditional quantitative approaches. As Richardson (1994) suggests these often highly personalised and imaginative accounts make use of "dramatic recall, strong metaphors, images, characters, unusual phrasings, puns, subtexts, and allusions" (p. 521). Richardson (1994) contends that accuracy in new ethnographic approaches to research is no longer an issue, rather the success of the narrative depends upon "coherence, verisimilitude, and interest" (p. 521). She believes that those who construct subjective narratives of this sort "are relieved of the problems of speaking for the 'Other,' because they are the Other in their texts" (p. 521). Through different, more subjective and experimental approaches to writing, Richardson (1994) contends that researchers can "relate more deeply and complexly to their materials" (p. 524). The capacity of writing to enable researchers to enter into their subjects "more deeply" is an element that is both fascinating and empowering for both researchers and readers.

Relishing in the 'fifth moment' and understanding research as experiential

Green (2002) in her advice to doctoral students suggests the following:

> For most of us, once we have settled on a research topic or question, there is a 'shopping around' period in which we consider a range of research approaches and what they might offer. This period of pushing the metaphoric shopping trolley and examining possible offerings from the research methodology shelf can be exhausting and fraught with frustration when choices do not seem obvious and when timelines are drawing in and the pressure to move on closes in. However, my experience as doctoral student, and later as supervisor, shows that if this period of selection is well spent and that alternatives are considered carefully, then many benefits are reaped. The fruits down the research track will be worth savouring for what they yield in clarifying purpose, in appropriate planning and preparation, in eliciting a smoother and less troublesome research process than might otherwise have been forthcoming, and in producing a coherent study which connects the 'what' and the 'how' (p. 5).

This description of the research process as it applies to doctoral students is in contrast to my own very different experience. This pragmatic, linear, calculating approach that suggests decisions must be made with certainty and problems must be avoided so that a satisfactory, clear-cut conclusion can be reached is not only foreign to my research experience, but also foreign to my teaching and learning experiences more generally. It suggests that clarity comes before the process itself; that you begin with a clear sense of purpose and that methodologies are determined for pragmatic, logical reasons – in order to get the job done and move on. While I can concede that this might be practical advice for many researchers,

it is neither useful nor meaningful for me. Dewey (1934) helps me to understand why. Dewey (1934) makes a distinction between the artist and the scientist. The artist, Dewey (1934) suggests, "has problems and thinks as he works ….The artist does his thinking in the very qualitative media he works in, and the terms lie so close to the object that he is producing that they merge directly into it" (p. 15). Inquiry for the artist, as Dewy suggests, is "embodied in the object" (p. 14). Inquiry and other ways of thinking occur through interaction with the object, through experience, through resting in the moment rather than moving systematically on to the next problem once a resolution has been found. The scientist's thinking is more remote because solutions are seen as steps to further inquiries. Dewey (1934) writes:

> The difference between the esthetic and the intellectual is thus one of the place where emphasis falls in the constant rhythm that marks the interaction of the live creature with his surroundings (p. 14).

The emphasis in Green's (2002) advice is on getting the job done with as few glitches as possible. Her approach is more applicable to a scientific, logical approach where the methodology is linear, sequential and systematic. An artistic and expressive methodology, however, allows me to enter experience in ways that are organic, intuitive, problematic and emotionally as well as cognitively, more penetrating. I do not see myself as the discerning shopper scanning supermarket shelves for suitable products to purchase. I do not intend to avoid the 'troublesome' nature of the research process; but prefer to draw attention to it. A more fitting analogy for me would not emerge from the world of consumerism but from the world of art making.

If I am to say that my research focuses on experience (and more precisely on the nature of significant thinking and learning experiences for teachers) as well as the experience of engaging in research, what do I mean by 'experience'? Dewey (1934) suggests that experience comes from "nature and man interacting with each other" (p. 15). In this interaction he writes, "human energy gathers, is released, damned up, frustrated and victorious. There are rhythmic beats of want and fulfilment, pulses of doing and being withheld from doing" (p. 15). In this sense experience is a complex phenomenon involving the seen and unseen, the tangible and intangible. It is difficult to penetrate and understand in concrete terms. According to Dewey (1934), "experience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality" (p. 18). Experience, he writes, "signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events" (p. 18). Dewey (1934) seems to suggest that experience is multileveled. He proposes that we can encounter life experiences at a more passive level where we "undergo sensations as mechanical stimuli or as irritated stimulations, without having a sense of the reality that is in them and behind them: in much of our experience our different senses do not unite to tell a common and enlarged story" (p. 21). Dewey (1934) aligns this passivity to feeling, seeing and hearing a report second hand. Alternatively, in a heightened state, our senses are fully engaged. Dewey (1934) states: "In this participation the varied wonder and splendour of this world are made actual for him in the qualities he experiences" (p. 22). In this heightened state, we recognise complexity rather than search for simplicity. We are open to tension, experimentation, surprise and spontaneity. We can reach a depth of

personal insight and feel profound emotions. It is this state of heightened experience that I want to capture, model and examine because here, I believe, lays the potential for deep learning.

I have started thinking about my research as experiential. For me the research process itself is a heightened state of experience that is vital and consuming because of its many layers. I am not a neutral observer. I participate in the research context as actively as the people I am attending to. It is through our interactions in a particular context that the 'stories' of our lived, often shared experience develop. Research begins within the multi-sensory landscape of lived lives, within the rich layers of raw, wondrous occurrences, interactions and sensations. And then there is the telling. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggest that stories are the closest we can get to experience: "People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones" (p. 415). I actively engage in the experience of artfully constructing narratives that enable me to get close to and understand my colleagues' experiences as well as my own. Through the experience of writing and experimentation I develop personal understandings and also seek to have impact on the reader. I purposely shape the text in ways that encourage the reader to actively interpret and question. I want the reader to engage in a reading experience that is emotional, moral and aesthetic (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). I am challenged by Richardson's (1994) questions: "How do we create texts that are vital? That are attended to? That make a difference?" In the shaping of research texts, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggest "we deal with questions of who we are in the field and who we are in the texts we write on our experience of the field experience" (p. 418). The

experience of being self-reflexive, of critically examining my own practice and becoming aware of the constraints within the research process adds a further layer of vitality. The contemporary postmodernist context within which I work creates new opportunities for "re-visioning writing" (Richardson, 1994) but also new areas for concern around credibility. Another layer of research experience comes through external critique, feedback and evaluation and the impact this has on the text (and my thinking and emotions) over time. This includes checking validity with research participants as well as seeking critical feedback from supervisors. Dealing with multiple and contradictory perspectives adds complexity to this layer of experience and works to prompt and urge new thinking. The *experience* of researching in the 'fifth moment' is a dynamic living process of communicating and building, in ongoing ways, understanding.

Writing as a method of inquiry

> It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. (Woolf , 1985, p.72)

People suggest that I should be suffering through this process, when in fact I am mostly elated. Why is that? I am writing about subjects, situations and people I care most deeply about. My concern is to "get behind a phenomenon" (Willis & Smith, 2000) and through interpretative and expressive approaches, I am making

new connections. I am learning. I am writing. I understand Virginia Woolf's rapture when, through the process of writing, patterns emerge, ideas develop and clarity is created. Writing can help us connect to our own humanity and the humanity in others. We begin to feel that we are on to something worthwhile and it is the writing and the construction of something that is inherently harmonious, aesthetic and inspiring that builds that sensation. Through the experience of writing and the development of ideas, images, arguments, narratives; we feel powerful, clever, knowing and confident. Even if just for a while.

A central focus of research writing as with other creative endeavours is to "discover what belongs to what" (Woolf, 1985, p.72): to make meaningful connections between disconnected experiences; to make links between theory and practice; to find the relationship between this body of work and an inquiry tradition; to develop a text that is structurally sound, logical and that hangs together as a cohesive whole. To compare products of educational research to 'works of art' seems odd, even irrelevant but perhaps it is timely to examine the connections. Educational research has been criticised for being narrow and one dimensional (Greene, 2000); as being reduced to "issues of measurement" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii); and of using language that is "often technical, abstract and obscure" (Pring, 2000, p. 4). In contrast, Ely (2007) suggests that "our reports must glow with life" (p. 569), that "people must want to read what we wrote, must want to stay" (p. 569). Research writing, Ely (2007) contends, must be mindful of readability, beauty and wider communication. Educators, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend, "are interested in life" (p.

xxii) and their research practices must find ways to capture experience in all its richness and complexity. They write:

> Educators are interested in learning and teaching and how it takes place; they are interested in the leading out of different lives, the values, attitudes, beliefs, social systems, institutions, and structures, and how they are all linked to learning and teaching. Educational researchers, with their interest in people, are no different in that sense than anyone pursuing research in the social sciences. These are the sciences of people. People's lives and how they are composed and lived out are what is of interest (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii).

Pring (2000) suggests that it is important to find what is distinctive about educational research so that it is not "seen simply as a subset of research within the social sciences" (p. 8). For Pring (2000) the distinction lies in the need for educational research to arise directly out of concerns related to the 'practice of education.' Educational research, according to Pring (2000) "must focus upon learning" (p. 13). Pring (2000) elaborates:

> Central to educational research, therefore, is the attempt to make sense of the activities, policies and institutions which, through the organisation of learning, help to transform the capacities of people to live a fuller and more distinctively human life. Such research needs to attend to what is distinctive of *being a person* – and of being one in a more developed sense. It needs to recognise that the 'what' and 'how' of *learning* those distinctively human capacities and understandings are by no means simple – they need to be analysed carefully (p. 17).

Research texts that are focused on learning, should model learning, capture learning and inspire learning rather than only focus, in simplistic ways on

conclusions and findings that arise from the process. Throughout the process of conducting research that is focused on learning, there should be explicit attention focused on the learning that is occurring, the barriers that stand in the way, the problematic nature of the experience, questions and uncertainties that arise through the process and the personal interpretations that are made. It is time, I believe, for educational research to move away from egocentric notions of researcher as 'expert' (Four Arrows, Don Trent Jacobs, 2008) and to think more carefully about what is entailed and required in the 'practice of education.' Perhaps an "epistemology of spirit" (Manulani Aluli Meyers, 2008) gets closer in meaning to what should be central in educational research. Manulani Aluli Meyers (2008) explains: "An epistemology of spirit encourages us all to be of service, to not get drawn into the ego nurtured in academia, and to keep diving into the wellspring of our own awe" (p. 18). The research experience fuelled by this spirit becomes a genuine search for understanding.

A narrative approach to research

Researchers who are interested in examining peoples' lives and the cultures that shape them are challenged by the inadequacies of representation. Denzin (1989), according to Vidich and Lyman (1994), offers good advice for contemporary ethnographers when he suggests that they "first immerse themselves in the lives of their subjects and, after achieving a deep understanding of these through rigorous effort, produce a contextualised reproduction and interpretation of the stories told by the subjects" (p. 42). This first phase of immersion requires a close, intimate and local perspective. When, as a researcher, I engage in dialogue

with my colleagues, I am in myself, as well as in the lives of others and focused on small details. I find ways to record activities, events and conversations. I observe, listen and attend sensing the importance of things. I look for ways to capture the "essence of a phenomenon" (van Manen, 1990, p. 77). I work at making my thinking "clear and deep" (Perkins, 1994, p. 67). I am aware of the impact my presence as a researcher has on those I am with. I probe and question in order to dig into particular moments in time. I walk twisted trails in search of other research that links to my own without a clear, well developed sense of the bigger picture, the map that draws connections between this place, this moment, this notion and another.

When, as researchers, we come to the experience of writing the research and composing a text, we shift into a new perspective of the territory. We move into "the long view" (Malouf, 1982, p. 117). I am reminded of Australian writer, David Malouf's novel *Fly Away Peter*. When the main character Jim, who is fighting in the First World War, is about to scramble over the trench into dangerous terrain, he has a moment of being "perfectly awake and clear headed" (Malouf, 1982, p. 116). He sees himself and the landscape and his fellow soldiers as though from above. He saw from there "the whole landscape through which he was moving: the irregular lines of trenches that made no sense at ground level" (p. 116). From this bird's eye view all the irregularities, the pitfalls, the mud and slush of this chaotic war scene, were "ironed out" (p. 116). Jim is able to hold both views in his mind, the bigger picture map of the territory, the longer view of things; with the smaller, more fragile view of life close up. The challenge of the research experience for me is to hold these two views in my

mind simultaneously. Finding a means of expression that allows me to create a fine balance between the longer, seemingly structured view and the intimate, close up, more complicated view of peoples' lives is essential. Combined with this is the tendency of one 'view' to unsettle the other. I am thinking of my experience yesterday, a conversation in my office with an ex-student that I have not been able to set to one side. It stays with me and even now makes my 'longer view' unstable and uncertain.

Tim's story

Tim (not his real name) completed the teacher education course I work within. He has been teaching for four years. We had a chance meeting in a DVD store and I noticed that Tim had lost weight. He looked drawn and sad. I said, "Let's get together soon. Are you okay?" Tim was an Art student and such an interesting thinker. During the course, he constructed a sculpture that consisted of a school door for us all, one by one, to stand in front of. On the top of the door, that was taken from a real institution, was lodged a speaker, and classroom sounds that he had recorded, filled the air above us as we each stood before the door. Tim asked us to reflect on our memories and thoughts. What was happening in our minds as we stood there? What experiences and memories were we taken back to? Did we feel like entering? Tim is a collector of found objects. He would bring in baskets bursting with unusual treasures that had been discarded by others as rubbish. As a class we talked about how such collections might be used in classrooms to inspire creative thinking. Even now in my office, he opens his bag and shows me a rusted, deformed spray can that he has picked

up in the university car park. He can not leave objects like this behind. He is compelled to take them. He talks about the stories he imagines in the gaps between bits of discarded litter. He makes connections and creates a narrative in order to feel whole.

When Tim was completing our course, he spent hours after school with a group of disengaged boys from a local secondary school who were passionate about German heavy metal music. He took photos, recorded conversations, read their journals and song lyrics and for a university assessment task, presented a gripping, highly sophisticated multi-media text that examined the lives of these boys and their experiences at school. In classrooms Tim opened up new worlds for his students. He enabled them to express ideas and themselves in ways they had never imagined possible. He used the desks in art rooms, etched over many years with students' names and comments, as archaeological objects and as inspiration for new art. He respected the lives of young people and showed them how everyday objects and activities can be turned into works of art.

Tim's students didn't know that he was leading a double life. He was operating normally at school and going home and not speaking. He would sit in a chair and not communicate with his family – his partner and four children. Gradually this numbness invaded the school space as well and he found himself standing in classrooms watching students like he was observing another world, unable to respond, unable to feel, unable to take action.

Tim ended up in the Psych ward of the local hospital. Twice. And his relationship with his partner broke down. Through conversations with doctors, a dark memory emerged that Tim had suppressed over many years: when he was twenty, he had been raped by another man, a man he had invited into his home as a friend. Over time, as Tim has talked about this experience with counsellors, he has been able to understand many aspects of his life, like his need for rituals and routines that will somehow protect him from harm. He has been able to make links between this experience and his gradual disconnection from people and reality. And a mounting desire to harm himself and die.

In the last few months Tim has become more positive about the future. He is reflecting on his own behaviours and sees some sense and meaning where at one time there was none. He is talking with others about his experience and through the conversations, setting himself free. He has made a special connection with someone who has had similar experiences. They understand one another without needing to say too much and there is no judgement. Tim is reconstructing himself through personal reflection, conversation and by building connections to others.

As we sat in my quiet office Tim told his story between moments of silence. As he revealed each layer of his painful experiences, I was aware of my own emotional responses. I imagined each scene in my mind's eye like I was there too. I felt so sorry that this had happened and felt a deep desire to want to make things right. What could I do? I felt that I knew each player: Tim's partner, his counsellor, his youngest child. I was there in my mind with each of them. When Tim left two hours later, I was tied up in knots and retreated to the toilet to cry.

I tell this story now (with Tim's permission) for a number of reasons. Tim is a teacher and his teaching can not be separated from who he is as a person. Each context, each personal history is unique and must be respected for that and understood. As a researcher interested in teaching and how teachers develop and learn, I need to find ways to value and take into account the fragile interconnections that exist between the public roles and responsibilities we undertake as teachers and our personal life stories that make us who we are. Tim's stories also highlight the complexity of learning and thinking processes. Our minds take us to places in seemingly unintentional ways. Ways of thinking that are forged over time as mental habits, as protective responses, as comfort zones determine powerfully how we act, what we believe, refuse to believe and so on. Tim's capacity to reflect deeply on his experiences and his own thinking are enabling him, at this early stage, to reconstruct some meaning in his life.

I am personally intertwined amongst the threads of Tim's story and feel caught and weighed down by the heaviness of the moments I shared with Tim in my office. I am there, like Jim in the trenches aware of my skirt caught around my knees, feeling my heart thumping, watching Tim as he fiddles with his corduroy trousers. Today, writing allows me to travel back to that time; to make some sense of my responses and to begin to take a longer view. Writing could help me to take an authoritative perspective, to now use that experience and write about it as a knowing expert. Writing (in a different sort of voice) also allows me to express the uncertainty, humility and inadequacy I truly feel. I ask myself through this text: who am I to write about the complex, difficult processes of

learning and thinking? Talking to Tim makes me even more suspicious of grand narratives and instrumental policies that take little account of the realities that exist for individuals and of the inextricable links between affect and cognition. For him and his learning and teaching. And for me and my research.

For me, expressing the complexity and beauty in a poignant moment, in an anecdote, is both creating an artful narrative and paying homage to the depth of experience and feeling that individuals express. These become my research moments. Van Manen (1990) writes: "Anecdotes can be understood as methodological devices in human science that make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us" (p. 166). Anecdotes, traces of past experience, snippets of story, as van Manen contends, have the power to reveal and express insight. They are accounts of experience that through the telling become significant. Some suggest that we are moving from an information society to a narrative society in which stories and images are the basis from which we make decisions (Jensen, 1999, Heikkinen, 2002). Businesses and particularly advertisers know this too well. As Heikkinen (2002) suggests, "in some cases, the product narratives have become more important than the product itself" (p. 13). In William Gibson's novel *Pattern Recognition* (2003), which explores amongst other things, the deep impact that logos have on us, Bigend, the powerful director of an advertising company says: "Far more creativity, today, goes into the marketing of products than into the products themselves …" (p. 67). Narrative, as Riessman and Speedy (2007) suggest is used by organisations, politicians, communities and nations to construct identity. They write: "Identities are no longer given and 'natural', individuals must now construct who they are and how

they want to be known, just as groups, organisations, and nations do" (p. 429). It is through the creative composition of narratives that we build a sense of identity that has continuity, purpose and is distinct and known.

Bruner (1986) suggests that narrative is a way of knowing and expressing what we know. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), "narrative is both phenomenon and method" (p. 416). Heikkinen (2002) suggests that narratives exist within research material that is conversational and when participants engage in writing. The attention here is on the meaning individuals assign to their experience that is largely revealed through story. Heikkinen (2002) contends that in narrative research the *voice* of the research subject is emphasised. When I think about my discussion with Tim, it is clear that he uses narrative structures to express and examine recent life events. Tim begins his explanation at a logical point, in the first inklings that something is not right for him at home. He unfolds his story using time and setting as key signifiers that things are changing and developing. He moves gradually through moments of high drama and conflict where problems seem immense and unsolvable. Toward the conclusion of our conversation, he reflects on what he is learning about himself, how he has made a new friend and how he is looking toward the future more positively. He brings 'characters' (his partner, the school principal, his children, doctors) to life through descriptions of what they do and say in particular moments and also through his own explicit interpretations of people. Some 'characters' are more sketchy and less developed. They are dark figures lurking in the background yet also powerful and influential in their absence. He describes places: his shed, the classroom, the hospital ward in ways that conjure visual images. He uses place as

another structural element that helps distinguish this part of the story from another. He tells his story in many voices. His voice is at times deliberate, quiet and lingering and at other times more energised by his dark and witty sense of humour. His silences are just as telling.

The narrative form allows Tim to meaningfully share and understand his experiences within the constraints of culture. He thinks narratively (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The discourse allows him to make unexpected connections, to show impact, to reveal emotions, to create empathy, to express personal values, to place and position certain players and to draw out themes, ideas and new possibilities. Narrative is central to our way of being. The richness and complexity of our lives are expressed through our stories and they are how we build shared understandings, empathy and purpose.

> Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long. These lived stories and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 35).

Narrativity, according to Heikkinen (2002), is also a means of engaging in the experience of analysis. Heikkinen (2002) writes: "In narrative analysis the main point of focus is the production of a new narrative on the basis of the narratives of the material" (p. 20). Tim's narrative becomes my narrative too. It is not only through the formal construction of a narrative analysis that this happens. It was during Tim's telling of his story that his narrative began to become mine also and

in this shift, the story reconstructs itself and has impact. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensional narrative inquiry space provides a useful lens for examining what I do when I begin to narrate someone else's narrative. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000, p. 50) three dimensions include the *personal* and *social* (the interaction); *past, present and future* (continuity)' and the notion of *place* (situation). They suggest that when we conduct research into experience, we focus on each of these elements. We situate the research within a context. We focus on personal and social aspects and we address temporal matters. We move, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) "inward and outward, backward and forward" (p. 50).

> By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward existential conditions, that is the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality – past, present and future (p. 50).

These dimensions are evident in Tim's telling of his story. He weaves between these dimensions focusing on personal feelings and interactions, places and spaces that are defined culturally, and aspects located in and influenced by different moments in time. He does not focus on each dimension separately or consciously, but rather the dimensions are interwoven and interact in interesting ways. When he paints a picture of himself locked in a hospital ward calmly devising and counting the ways he could kill himself (if he really wanted to), he is relaying the internal and calculating thoughts from that moment as well as evoking a sense of space and a particularly drastic moment in his changing life circumstances. It is the coming together of these dimensions that create

meaningful narratives that can be shared with others and understood. As a narrative researcher using narrative as a form of inquiry, I can use these dimensions in a number of ways: as a lens through which to understand how narrative works; as notions that enable me to analyse my own readings and responses; as dimensions that link also to my own stories that are triggered as I research; and as structural elements that can be used in my own reconstruction of research narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that as researchers they see themselves "always in the midst" (p. 63) of stories. When I gave this text to Tim to read and respond to, he said that the narrative enabled him to look at his experience and see meaningful connections that he had not himself made. He was also immediately inspired to write. I am keenly aware that this is the territory I travel in. I am surrounded by the continuous telling and retelling and reshaping of stories, and so this doctorate is an expression of my experience in that landscape.

An imaginary conversation with Carolyn Ellis about autoethnography

Me (in an imaginary conversation with Carolyn Ellis): I see you in 1996 sitting in your living room, the brick fireplace, the cathedral ceiling, the cedar living area, the cluttered bookshelves, talking with Art about ethnography and patting your dogs. You say that ethnography was historically about cultural analysis, about inscribing patterns and giving perspective on life. You suggest that with the breaking down of old boundaries between disciplines, the idea of ethnography has broadened.

Carolyn (in an actual conversation but not with me): In the 1970s and 1980s postmodernists, poststructuralists, and feminists challenged us to contemplate how social science may be closer to literature than to physics. These critiques helped draw ethnographers who thought of themselves as sociologists and anthropologists closer to colleagues in history, women's studies, folklore, media studies, and communication. We not only began to question the usefulness of boundaries between disciplines, but some of us became downright hostile toward our own disciplines (Ellis, 1996, p. 18).

Me: Educational researchers like myself can benefit too from the blurring of boundaries and the exploration of new approaches. I have been inspired, refreshed and moved by your approaches to autoethnography Carolyn. You say in your autoethnographic novel (2004) that autoethnography is "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political" (p. xix). When reading your novel I was drawn immediately into the world of your classroom where you engaged with your students in discussions around the problematic issues surrounding research and representation. For me engaging at an ideas level as well as a personal and emotional level enabled me to think more evocatively and deeply about the possibilities inherent in research as well as the responsibilities.

Carolyn: What we're trying to do is enlarge the space to practice ethnographic writing as a form of creative nonfiction, to take certain expressive liberties associated with the arts, but to feel the ethical pull of converting data into experiences readers can use (Ellis, 1996, p. 28).

Me: I remember reading the piece titled 'A secret life in a culture of thinness: reflections on body, food and bulimia' in the text you edited with Art: *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*, (1996). The writer, Tillmann-Healy (1996) tells her personal story of living with bulimia. She moves in and out of personal episodic stories that are recreated as poetic fragments. She intersperses her personal story with references to research studies and her own reflexive voice that makes provocative connections between the political, social and personal. This is the sort of writing that can have a profound effect on readers. As someone who had anorexia as a young woman and who has worked with many girls in schools who suffer from this illness, I connected with the writing on a number of important levels and found that I learned more about this disorder (and myself) from reading this one text, than I had from reading and listening to scores of health and medical professionals.

Carolyn: On the whole, autoethnographers don't want you to sit back as spectators; they want readers to feel and care and desire (Ellis, 1994, p. 24).

Me: Carolyn, I must finish writing now. That doesn't mean that I've said all I want to say about the research process. Other things may be more meaningfully discussed in the context of the research projects I'm about to examine. But my dog is here panting with a tennis ball dropped strategically at her feet. How can I ignore those pleading eyes? I know you understand. Can you give me any last minute advice as a researcher trying to find her way?

Carolyn: Don't be afraid to make ethnography dangerous, political, and personal. Take risks. Write from the heart as well as the head. Turn the field back on yourself. Turn yourself against canonical stories. Closely examine the production of your texts and theirs. Give respect to empathy and solidarity, but try to hear Others speaking back. These are our themes (Ellis, 1996, p. 42).

Interval

Using the story of the earth to understand the landscape of learning

Sedimentary rock

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Sedimentary rocks are formed because of the overburden pressure as particles of sediment are deposited out of air, ice, wind, gravity, or water flows carrying the particles in suspension. As sediment deposition builds up, the overburden (or 'lithostatic') pressure squeezes the sediment into layered solids in a process known as lithification ('rock formation') and the original connate fluids are expelled. The term diagenesis is used to describe all the chemical, physical, and biological changes, including cementation, undergone by a sediment after its initial deposition and during and after its lithification, exclusive of surface weathering.

Sedimentary rocks are laid down in layers called beds or strata. That new rock layers are above older rock layers is stated in the principle of superposition. There are usually some gaps in the sequence called unconformities. These represent periods in which no new sediments were being laid down, or when earlier sedimentary layers were raised above sea level and eroded away.

Sedimentary rocks contain important information about the history of Earth. They contain fossils, the preserved remains of ancient plants and animals. Coal is considered a type of sedimentary rock. The composition of sediments provides us with clues as to the original rock. Differences between successive layers indicate changes to the environment which have occurred over time.

Sedimentary rocks can contain fossils because, unlike most igneous and metamorphic rocks, they form at temperatures and pressures that do not destroy fossil remnants.

Searching for new metaphors

> New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 235).

In my search for alternative metaphors for learning, I began to think about sedimentation. The formation of sedimentary rock which covers a large proportion of the earth is created through a dynamic, complicated, spontaneous process. Aspects of this process are outlined in the extract taken from the online, free encyclopedia Wikipedia*. Sedimentary rocks transform over time through persistent environmental forces. The unique history of a rock present in past layers is part of its ever-evolving identity. There are fleeting as well as continuous connections between new sediments and earlier layers that are constantly in a state of being worn away and solidified. There are gaps and irregularities, fossils stuck permanently, as well as beautiful harmonies between colours and texture. It is a process that can be examined closely but suggesting that one moment, one fragment is exactly like another, is misleading.

Searching for a way to examine the relationship between geological forces and learning, I came finally to poetry. Rather than logically tie the concepts down, I decided to use a form of language that would open up possibilities and reveal something fresh and interesting, as well as something personal; that would "render the world newly strange, rescue it from obviousness" and "fill it with gaps that call upon the reader" (Bruner, 1986, p. 24). On my bookshelf was

Sylvia Plath's *Collected Poems* (1981). I stumbled on an opening line that spoke to me in the context of my thinking about this research:

I shall never get you put together entirely,

Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.

I wrote those lines on my computer and slowly began to construct my own. I looked at the wall in my study and there was my father's map, a map of the world that he created for a school assignment when he was 13 years old, that I framed not long after he died. Here was a connection to my thinking about the earth; and also one linked to personal learning. The world has changed so much; his map is not an accurate representation. Yet what interests me more, is that he drew it by hand. It reminds me of the importance of the hand and mind working together fuelled by passion, persistence and curiosity. It reminds me that I am learning, largely traveling solo, through this complicated research process. It also takes me to my father and so my relationship with him is also connected.

"I shall never get you put together entirely,

Pieced, glued, and properly jointed"

Sylvia Plath, *The Colossus (1959)*

I shall never sew these ends up neatly,

No matter how hard I try.

I map like my father but his portrait of the world

Is so neatly articulated, like fine, spidery embroidery,

School-like and laboured.

My map of the earth is fiery.

Fine sediments swirl in harsh weather

And settle somewhere, to create layers of stony reminders.

Squashed beneath us, forced to relate and separate,

Expelled of all fluid and air; our unforgiving launching pad.

His map is neutral. Now that he is gone I look to those coastlines

For traces of him.

Who was the boy who wrote Morocco on a slant,

who went there only in his mind?

Whose measured gridlines are really so fragile?

My map is suspended, not solid on paper;

Agitated in the holding bay, awaiting release,

Longing for the self-satisfaction of completion.

You had that. In the corner of the parched paper

Is a mark in ink: ten out of ten.

My map rebuffs conformity.

There are gaps in the sequence that refuse to be understood.

Like you. You hated school. And repressive teachers.

Yet, you made a world so beautifully formed

By gazing at night stars and dreaming of distance.

My map is a complex web of connections, more difficult than airline paths,

Perhaps like the trails of migratory birds; intuitive and deeply set.

It is a Marden painting: multi-layered, muted, in motion.

My map is relational, wide awake to the simple and complex connections

Between things.

Your map is really no more bound than mine.

Through it I see you on cold evenings shading the sea around Madagascar,

Wondering about your ancestors in Edinburgh - and those to come.

The beauty of your line stays with me,

Dark and definite and lightly stretching across oceans of sea.

for my father

** I have chosen to include information about sedimentary rock published on Wikipedia because it does not pretend to be an authoritative source; rather information can be edited, added to and included as worthy, by anyone at any time. Wikipedia, as a truly collaborative text created through new technologies, that is shaped and reshaped in ongoing way, forces us to consider issues related to reliability and authorship. Given that these are issues relevant to my own research interests, it seemed fitting to make use of an informative text that is open and reflexive in nature.*

Chapter Four

The relational nature of meaning-full learning: Collaborative Learning Partnerships

Context: Library conference room, Sandstone Secondary College (late Spring, 2003; after school)

We sit around two tables, six teachers having come from different corners of a busy three campus secondary college. I had come from a classroom too, in a university setting where I teach pre-service secondary teachers. We sit in the library conference room, a large window at one end overlooking the college garden where ancient cypress trees stand still and magnificent. Not that we notice them. A sense of communal weariness pervades the room. We lean tiredly on tables. Chairs are left vacant between each person as though we need space with which to separate one world from another, one person from another. As teachers we often have shared experiences, understandings, values and yet the slice of life that is our classroom is known only to ourselves (and our students) and difficult to talk about. This ambiguity, this tension between the said and unsaid, between established and tacit knowledge, between feelings and words, and between what we know and what we do, hangs over us always. Sometimes I am aware of larger spaces between groups of teachers when they meet together to converse; these people are weary after a day of teaching but they respect and trust one another and feel connected by the palpable threads of ongoing conversation and shared experience. The teachers begin slowly, hesitantly to unpack their bags and suddenly a shift occurs. When the objects are placed shyly

on the tables, the spaces start to heave and change shape. People readjust their chairs and move closer together. We move from a state of weariness to a sense of apprehension and intrigue. This will be a different sort of meeting and who knows what direction it will take us in.

We came together, as we did on regular occasions, to talk about our professional learning, our teaching and the connections we were making. We were involved in a school based initiative we called Collaborative Learning Partnerships (CLP). This meeting took place toward the end of the first year of that project. While the CLP initiative has evolved and changed since that first year, it is still, six years on, an integral component of Sandstone Secondary College's professional learning program.

In the midst of living relations

At the time of that meeting and when I was actively conducting research for this project, I was employed part-time as a staff member in the school. I worked within the school for four years. My role was to work primarily with teachers and school leaders to help them to enhance students' learning. I also worked part-time as a teacher educator at the local university. One of the intended goals behind this unique arrangement was to build a partnership between Sandstone Secondary College and the university so that the two institutions could learn from one another and generate new opportunities for dialogue, research and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Van Manen (1990), writing about phenomenological research, contends that researching lived experience "requires of the researcher that he or she stands in the fullness of life, in the midst of the world of living relations and shared situations" (p. 32). According to van Manen (1990) the researcher who works in the midst of lived experience must engage in a "reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special qualities" (p. 32). Van Manen (1990) suggests that when research takes part within the complex, dynamic nature of human lives "the critical moments of inquiry are ultimately elusive to systematic explication" (van Manen, 1990, p. 34); in other words, there are no formulas. Instead, these moments of inquiry depend "on the interpretive sensitivity, inventive thoughtfulness, scholarly tact, and writing talent" (p. 34) of the researcher. In reality the experience of standing in the midst of the research context as a participant, is problematic and multi-faceted and demands deep respect for private lives as well as ongoing critical reflection on research processes. It requires "wakefulness to relationships" (Craig & Huber, 2007, p. 256); paying attention to the complex web of interpersonal connections between people in the research context. Being an insider enables a researcher to relish in the familiar, to respond emotionally and build a sense of belonging with others that is satisfying and affirming. The researcher can experience first hand the excitement, pressures and difficulties related to working within an organization alongside others. Rather than being a distant observer moving in shadow-like ways around the periphery of the research context, I played an active role in generating new possibilities, leading, and learning alongside my colleagues. This chapter, however, is not about judging the effectiveness of the professional learning initiatives that were put in place at that time. Rather, it is about

capturing what deep and meaning-full learning is like for these teachers. It is about looking at professional learning in action and using the words of teachers to identify what learning is like for them. When there is an ongoing conversation between people who have come to know one another well and when trusting and respectful relationships are built, a researcher can experience "an up-close view of the school context" (Craig & Huber, 2007, p. 261) and also involve participants more actively in the research process. For Craig and Huber (2007) a relational perspective that allows understanding to be built from within, is central to narrative inquiries that take place in the midst of peoples' lives.

As I sit around the table in the library discussion room with these teachers who have become friends, I listen enthralled as they reflect on what they have learned over the year as teachers who have been helping other teachers to learn. I see myself in their stories and I see connections to conversations I have had with other teachers. Toward the end of the conversation, when Kate compares the learning environment at the school to her garden, I see myself as a plant amongst others endeavouring to thrive. Now as I write some time after this event, I am the gardener, working to shape and prune something intricate and knotty.

Collaborative Learning Partnerships: an initiative to enhance professional learning

Located in Sandstone, a regional town with a rich cultural heritage, Sandstone Secondary College is a large three campus government secondary school that has two middle school sites and one senior campus. It is a town where generational

unemployment is high in some neighbourhoods. Youth unemployment is much higher than in neighbouring regions and in 2003 was 48% higher than the state average. The rate of school absenteeism in the region was 10% higher than the state average. Large areas on the outskirts of town contain housing commission homes constructed in the 1950s and sprawling new estates. Other areas close to the city centre and established park land have large prestigious homes that fetch high prices equivalent to those in the inner suburbs of Australia's largest cities. The town is one of the fastest growing regional centres in the state. Itinerant and unemployed people are drawn to low rents in some areas. Families are also drawn to the town because of the diverse range of schools, work opportunities in large established companies, well developed sporting and recreational facilities and because the town offers a relaxed alternative to the accelerating pace of city life. The town has five large independent schools, including single sex Catholic schools, and four government secondary schools.

Sandstone Secondary College is the largest of the government schools and is an amalgamation of what were once two separate schools, one being a technical school. The two current middle school sites are located in low socio-economic areas of the town, while the senior campus is located in the city centre. In 2003 there were approximately 130 teaching staff and 1400 students enrolled across the three campuses. Data collected by the school at this time indicated very low and declining achievement levels in the middle years particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy as well as high levels of student disengagement and alienation. Findings from the Victorian Quality Schools Project (Hill, P., Rowe. K., Holmes-Smith, P. & Russell, V., 1996), which was a large longitudinal study

of student learning across the state of Victoria, suggested that these trends were not uncommon. According to one of the authors of that report, Russell (2000), this study showed that in participating Victorian schools "no growth was found to have taken place in student literacy and numeracy achievement during Years 5 to 8; in fact the achievement level of the lowest 25 per cent of students actually declined, especially at Year 7. Students' enjoyment of schooling was also shown to decline markedly during Years 5 to 9" (p. 9). Due to very low levels of achievement in state government testing, Sandstone Secondary College was eligible for a substantial increase in funding through a government initiative called Access to Excellence. The funding was allocated to schools to employ additional teachers and to develop strategies to improve literacy, numeracy and engagement. At Sandstone Secondary College it was decided to use the funding to develop a focus on professional learning for all teachers; to increase the effectiveness of teachers and enhance what they were doing in classrooms to help students learn.

There is no doubt that the decision to focus on teacher effectiveness was influenced by local and international research that was highly promoted at the time. In 2003 the theme for the annual conference for the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was 'Building Teacher Quality: What does the research tell us'? The research voices that were heard most strongly were Australian researcher Ken Rowe, New Zealander John Hattie as well international educator Linda Darling-Hammond. These researchers were keynote speakers at the ACER conference (2003) and had a similar message to share about teachers. They contended that teacher quality, more than any other factor,

made the most difference to students' level of achievement. Rowe (2002), drawing upon findings from the Victorian Quality Schools Project (1996) stated:

> When all other sources of variation are taken into account, including gender, social backgrounds of students and differences between schools, the largest differences in student achievement are between classes. That is, by far the most important source of variation in student achievement is teacher quality (p. 1).

The term 'quality' is problematic and yet it has entered into the vernacular of education, like so many other difficult words, with assurance and assertiveness. Like much of the language presently shaping education, the term 'quality' is more commonly aligned with the field of business and economics and more applicable to products than people. What is a 'quality' teacher? Is there one way to define quality or multiple ways? What do 'quality' teachers do in classrooms to help students to learn? Are 'quality' teachers always 'effective' in all types of schools with all types of students? Do 'quality' teachers continue to learn and develop increased levels of 'quality'? Are 'effective' schools largely made up of 'quality' teachers? Is 'quality' learned or associated with attributes that some people have even before they set foot in classrooms? Who is and should be responsible for defining what we mean by 'quality'?

Use of the term 'achievement' should also be open to scrutiny. How do we define and measure 'achievement'? Which achievements are valued more highly than others? Whose values dominate in policy making around 'achievement' and why are some values more seriously considered than others? Questions like these should be the basis of vigorous and public debate and importantly, teachers

and students should be actively involved in dialogue that shapes our understandings. Notions of 'quality' and 'achievement' that are "technical/rational construals" of teaching and learning (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998b) are often based on narrow conceptions of what matters. Hill, Rowe, Holmes-Smith and Russell's (1996) findings from The Victorian Quality Schools Project (1996) were based upon achievement data from testing in English and Mathematics. One might question whether our notions of 'quality' teaching should be influenced solely upon achievement in high stakes tests in narrowly defined areas that do not reveal in an holistic sense, what a student is capable of thinking and doing in a range of meaningful, authentic contexts.

Many teachers at Sandstone Secondary College would say that good teaching is a complex business reliant on a number of factors. They would suggest that the challenging life circumstances and attitudes to schooling of many of the young people in their classrooms also impacts on achievement. The teachers at Sandstone Secondary College have placed an emphasis on issues related to student wellbeing because they believe that social and emotional issues impact on students' capacity to learn well at school. The school has an established breakfast program so that all students can start the day with food in their stomachs. They have employed full time student counsellors at each campus and have incorporated self esteem, resilience building and social skills programs like You Can Do It (a program focused on building social and emotional capabilities developed by Professor Michael E. Barnard) into the curriculum. They work to create positive links to the community and invite parents to play active roles within the school. It is difficult for a school like this that has a clear focus on

building positive relationships with students, caring about students' wellbeing, and making connections to community, to contend with state-wide data that indicates they are 'underperforming'.

At Sandstone Secondary College we heard the messages about the need to improve teaching. We heard Darling-Hammond (2004) insist that "teachers need deep understanding of subject matter, student learning approaches, and diverse teaching strategies to develop practices that will allow students to reach these new standards" (p. 1078). We were challenged by Haberman's (2004) powerful assertion: "Only teachers who are avid, internally motivated learners can truly teach their students the joy of learning. The frequently espoused goal of lifelong learning for our students is hollow rhetoric unless the school is also a learning community in which teachers demonstrate engagement in meaningful learning activities" (p. 52). We were also motivated by Barthe's (1990) notion that "teacher growth is closely related to pupil growth" (p. 49). Barthe (1990) contends: "Probably nothing within a school has more impact on students in terms of skills development, confidence, or classroom behaviour than the personal and professional growth of their teachers" (p. 49). Once, as a leadership team, we had firmly agreed on a focus of developing the school as a learning community, we created opportunities for teachers and students to discuss their beliefs about how people learn. These conversations led to the development of a Teaching and Learning Framework that included key domains related to three broad areas: relationships, knowledge building and teaching and learning processes. This framework came to inform curriculum planning, school policies and procedures, and approaches to teachers' professional development.

Considering ways to make more meaningful links between the Framework and what happened in classrooms for teachers and students, led us to the development of the Collaborative Learning Partner (CLP) initiative.

In the first year of the initiative, most of the extra funding provided by the governement was used to release seven teachers from some of their teaching. These people were called CLPs and they spent approximately .4 of their teaching load working with other teachers in classrooms. All teachers were given the opportunity to work as a CLP and in that first year 20 teachers volunteered to take part. A selection process involved interviewing teachers and evaluating their applications against a set of criteria, these being:

- Demonstrated willingness to learn;
- Demonstrated interpersonal skills and ability to work collaboratively as part of a team; and
- Demonstrated knowledge of the Teaching and Learning Framework.

Based on our experiences during that first year, the attributes of an effective CLP were identified. CLPs are:

- Lifelong learners who have a passion for inquiry based learning.
- Teachers who have well developed understandings about teaching and learning processes and are interested in current educational research.
- Teachers who have well developed interpersonal skills, communication skills and have strategies which enable them to collaborate effectively with others.
- Teachers who have the ability to reflect on and understand their own thinking and the thinking of others.

- Teachers who are able to think creatively and analytically.
- Teachers who use various strategies to help others to reflect.
- Teachers who have good organizational skills.

The CLPs used the Teaching and Learning Framework as the basis of their work with other teachers. The framework and associated support documents provided teachers with a platform from which to plan curriculum together; pin point ideas and initiate discussion; focus classroom observations; model and share new strategies and approaches; evaluate lessons; and reflect on what was being learned. It was there as a guiding document but was not intended to constrain and frame everything that happened in the partnerships. The teachers were free to examine what emerged through the process of working together and to take action based on the needs of individual teachers and students. On average the CLPs worked closely with 4 other teachers who became their 'partners'. The selection of partners was a flexible process. All teachers in the college were given the opportunity to volunteer to work with a CLP. In the first two years 27 teachers took part in the program as partners.

The CLPs met once every three weeks as a group to reflect collaboratively on their experiences and to think more about the domains identified in the Teaching and Learning Framework. It became apparent very quickly that the relationship between the CLP and their partners was an important factor that contributed to the level of professional learning that could occur. Professional learning opportunities for CLPs in their regular meetings also examined relationship building and emotional intelligence. As an example, the CLPs would role-play

discussions they might have with their partners so that they could practice and model for one another questioning techniques, giving constructive feedback, prompts to enhance reflection and active listening. As well as discussing selected readings, the CLPs would also engage in learning activities and discussions aimed at building understanding of the domains in the framework.

In most cases the CLPs stayed in the role for one year, although some teachers reapplied to continue the work the following year and were successful. The intention was to give as many teachers as possible the opportunity to work as a CLP. Teachers who worked as partners would often apply to be CLPs the following year. Each year, as the program developed, more teachers volunteered to be involved. Over four years three quarters of the teaching staff in the college had been involved in the program, either as CLPs or as teacher partners.

I have previously published two pieces that examine the CLP initiative and its impact on teachers and their learning (McGraw, 2004, McGraw 2006).

Teachers' professional learning set against a background of emerging tensions

It is important at this point to examine the broader context in relation to teacher professional development in Australia. What approaches to teacher professional development are most commonly used? And what are teachers expected to learn? I use the term 'professional development' here because that is the term commonly used by systems, agencies, subject associations and teachers to refer to activities

that intend to help teachers to learn. In other places I use the term 'professional learning'. I agree with Hoban (2002) that "the word 'learning' is preferred to 'development' because learning is essentially non-linear, whereas 'development' suggests a linear step-by-step process" (p. 68). Professional development programs Hoban (2002) contends usually involve "the presentation of new *content* over a relatively short *time*"; whereas professional learning is longer term and includes multiple opportunities for learning (p. 68).

As Grundy and Robison (2004) suggest, "teaching is forever an unfinished profession. Thus, professional development is intrinsic to the vocation of teaching" (p. 146). Models that promote continuing professional development are increasingly seen as important because of the "unfinished" nature of the work teachers do. A recent study by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) that examined the impact of professional development programs funded by the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme (AGQTP) on teachers and student outcomes, reported that:

> Policy makers and school administrators need to give equal attention to building the conditions that will enable schools to provide fertile ground for professional learning on an ongoing basis and as a routine part of the job. This study indicates that a substantial level of professional community is vital to significant change. The key ingredients here are time to think, analyse and talk about the specifics of what is going on in classrooms and what students are doing and learning (Ingvarson, Meiers, Beavis, 2005, p. 17).

AGQTP is one of the current key funding sources available to Australian schools for professional development. The ACER report on AGQTP funded projects

states that the school context and the support that exists for professional learning is important and that "it is not enough to provide well-designed professional development programs from outside of the school" (Ingvarson, Meiers, Beavis, 2005, p. 17). While the report suggests that active learning within the school context is vital, the writers also suggest that teachers should analyse their practice "in relation to professional standards for good practice" (p. 8) and that activities should "draw teachers into close comparison of what their students are learning in relation to what students of that age and circumstance are capable of learning" (p. 8). In other words, the report suggests in subtle if not concerning ways, that effective professional development should prepare teachers to use externally devised, narrow and common standards to judge students as learners as well as themselves as teachers.

While, as Grundy and Robison (2004) suggest, the notion of 'development' is central to the profession of teaching, Elmore (2002) interestingly points out that schools "aren't designed as places where people are expected to engage in sustained improvement of their practice" (p. 4). He contends: "Teachers are still, for the most part, treated as solo practitioners operating in isolation from one another under conditions of work that severely limit their exposure to other adults doing the same work" (p. 4). Elmore (2002) argues that most of the current workplace learning that teachers do emphasizes individual performance against current policies and practices. Grundy and Robison (2004) also argue that current trends in Australia show a "swing back to the focus on the individual" (p. 161) through an emphasis on individual performance against externally prescribed standards and accountability for outcomes. Elmore (2002) suggests

there are a number of tensions in current approaches to professional development for teachers. There is a focus on professional development being linked to system-wide improvement and standards while there is also a belief that schools and individual teachers should determine their own approaches and take ownership. There is a focus on teachers learning 'content' (AGQTP priority areas were literacy, numeracy, mathematics, science, information technology and vocational education and training) while there is also a focus on teachers enhancing 'process' related capacities like group problem-solving and interpersonal skills (Elmore, 2002, p. 9). Another interesting tension relates to measuring the outcomes of professional learning for teachers. A major national mapping report titled *PD 2000 Australia* (McRae, Ainsworth, Groves, Rowland & Zbar, 2001) stated: teachers "are not self-employed, and thus the choices they have are constrained by the priorities of their employers, and as a current overarching theme, by the directions and requirements of governments" (p. 1). The cost, the report suggests, of professional development is high. In 1996 the total spent across Australia for one quarter was $131.9m (McRae, Ainsworth, Groves, Rowland & Zbar, 2001, p. 1). They argue that governments invest highly, yet it is often difficult to gauge in measurable terms the impact of professional learning on what happens in classrooms, and sometimes the effects, the report suggests, "are never apparent" (p. 1). While, as suggested in the *PD 2000 Australia* (2001) report, there is an expectation that professional development be about conforming to employer demands, there are also those who argue that the personal and biographical dimensions of professional learning are crucial (Goodson, 1992a) and that the basic purpose of professional development is to extend, grow and renew (Grundy and Robison, 2004, p. 148). Bolam and

McMahon (2004) suggest that “the issue of how to strike an appropriate balance between meeting the needs of individual professionals on the one hand and of the school and national policy on the other, has been, and still is, alive” (p. 51).

What counts as worthwhile knowledge as well as desirable outcomes is also highly contestable. Day (2004) argues that teachers not only need to be knowledgeable about learning processes and the learning needs of students, “they also need to be knowledgeable about themselves” (p. 131). He suggests that professional development “must be set within the contexts of personal and institutional needs” (p. 132), that personal passions, experience, enthusiasms and interests should be an important focus. This stands in contrast to more technical, managerial approaches that Sachs and Logan (1990) suggest currently dominate. Bolam and McMahon (2004) also concur. After examining research from several countries, they suggest that “national needs have been dominant since the mid-1980s” (p. 51). In a centralized and regulated climate, where compliance is expected, Smyth (1995) argues it is crucial that professional development is “a process of enlivening teachers and turning schools into critical and inquiring communities” (p. 3).

A further tension exists between what we understand about effective teacher learning and the sorts of activities teachers spend most of their time attending. The ACER study conducted by Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005, p. 15) found that the most effective professional learning programs provided opportunities for teachers to focus on the content of their discipline areas, included opportunities for teachers to collaboratively examine student work,

enabled teachers to reflect on their practice, involved them in the planning process, provided time for teachers to try new strategies, and provided opportunities for teachers to receive feedback, support and coaching. These factors, the report suggests are consistent with elements identified in other research (Hawley and Valli, 1999). These sorts of experiences, however, according to the *PD 2000 Australia* (2001) study, are not the types of activity that dominate. The writers of the report conclude:

> The types of activity that are the core formats for teacher professional development at present are: workshop discussion; listening to a speaker followed by discussion; and conference attendance. The dominant mode remains workshop or seminar/discussion activity, most frequently on a one-off basis (McRae, Ainsworth, Groves, Rowland & Zbar, 2001, p. 9).

In the face of an absence of large scale professional development projects aimed at transforming schools through collaborative action and active learning networks, it is little wonder that teachers are frequenting externally based, disconnected one-off events. Two projects that presented ongoing learning opportunities for teachers in Australia were the Innovative Links Project and Australian National Schools Network (NSN), both of which are no longer operating. In both cases systems, teachers and universities worked together to foster partnerships to develop action research proposals, and collaboratively and critically reflect on teaching practice.

According to Sachs (2003, p. 98), the NSN focused on two questions:

1. What is it about the way teachers work, in particular, the way they teach and organize their work, that gets in the way of student learning?
2. How can educators support each other to make the changes that are good for both learners and teachers?

As Sachs (2003) suggests, building a research culture in schools that was both critically reflective and personally transforming, was central to the way the NSN worked. These questions provide a very different way of framing teacher learning compared to the AGQTP model currently in use.

The Innovative Links Project was another nationwide project that according to Sachs (2003) emerged from the procedures and principles developed through the NSN project. The Innovative Links Project operated between 1994 and 1996 and provided the opportunity for 14 universities across Australia to work in partnerships with practicing teachers on a whole school basis (Sachs, 2003). One effective approach used in the Innovative Links Project was case writing.

> Collaborative teams from schools and the university developed action research projects which used case writing to record practice. The members of each team determined their focus for inquiry and case writing, and their professional development pathway and time-scale, meeting regularly and collectively in regional, state and national forums (Cherednichenko, Gay, Hooley, Kruger and Mulraney, 1998, p. 44).

In the absence of organised national networks like the ones mentioned that fostered partnerships, innovative practice and critical reflection, schools and universities have had to forge their own connections. AGQTP funded projects that have largely taken over as the main national approach to professional

development, are fundamentally different in focus. They ask that schools invite university colleagues to work within projects as critical friends which is a different approach from the collaborative, democratic, research based approaches used by the NSN and the Innovative Links Projects. Another major difference lies in the requirement that AGQTP places on schools to focus on priority areas designated by the government, rather than on schools and universities talking together about areas for reform. The NSN schools, through action research projects and case writing were able to explore the impact of reforms created in schools in meaningful ways that captured complexity. Current AGQTP accountability processes, in contrast, ask participating teachers and project leaders to complete simplistic surveys that require them to measure impact against specified outcomes. The emphasis is on being able to show that teachers are meeting required standards, being accountable to government priorities and showing improvement. Data gathering processes that rely on quick, generalised judgments fail to capture the complexity of contextualized learning and provide little in the way of helping us to understand how teachers can learn deeply in ongoing ways in the context of their work.

Set against this background of competing tensions and demands, the CLP initiative sought to reclaim teachers' independence and through structures open to possibility and collaboration, provide opportunities for teachers to discover more about learning by examining their own learning at school.

The CLP experience: learning through dialogue and the *reflective grasp*

Dialogue as a kind of talk that manifests, captures and shapes thinking is central to the CLP experience. Time was formally made available through the school's meeting structure and timetable for teachers to talk together about their learning and teaching experiences. The CLPs were allocated time release from teaching to generate and engage in conversations with other teachers. All teachers involved in the CLP experience met on regular occasions for lunch. On these occasions the CLPs and their partners would share significant stories and new learning with one another. School leaders and other participants would pose challenging, provocative questions for the CLPs and partners to respond to. These conversations over lunch around tables were interactive, revealing and sometimes uncomfortable. Through these exploratory conversations teachers articulated what they were discovering and shared significant moments. The CLPs also met once every three weeks to reflect on their experiences, share stories, problem solve and engage in new learning around areas of interest emerging through the experiences. The CLPs and their partners met regularly in classrooms and staffrooms to plan together, teach together and reflect. The conversations created a complex web of communication. The message the school sent through this allocation of time to talk and reflect, was that teaching is not all about doing. It is also about thinking. Teachers were engaging in what Joseph Beuys might refer to as a 'permanent conference', an ongoing exchange of ideas and thoughts to stimulate action.

Beuys proposed an ‘expanded concept of art’ that included dialogue as well as experiential and social processes as integral components of art making (Harlan, 2004). As both an academic working within the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf, Germany and a practicing artist, Beuys engaged in a process of permanent conference that he referred to as ‘social sculpture’. He would organize Actions or Happenings, large gatherings of people who would engage in the dynamic of dialogue in order to transform understanding. Sometimes these Actions went on for days. In social sculpture Beuys believed people moulded and shaped their worlds (Harlan, 2004). In a conversation with Harlan, Beuys discussed concepts that are central to social sculpture: the capacity to respond and be internally active, to make meaningful connections and to be alive to change (Harlan, 2004).

Dialogue is at the heart of Beuys notion of permanent conference and to transformative change. Dialogue, according to Bohm (1996b) is a “stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us” (p. 7). Bohm (1996b) suggests, “It’s something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It’s something creative. And this shared meaning is the “glue” or “cement” that holds people and societies together” (p. 7). Dialogue, Bohm (1996b) suggests is different to discussion where the emphasis is on analysing and expressing different points of view. In dialogue “nobody is trying to win” (Bohm, 1996b, p. 7). Those engaging in dialogue are not playing a game against each other; alternatively, they are playing with each other (Bohm, 1996b, p. 7). Dialogue is more connected with thought processes therefore there are no guarantees. It may not be doing anything “visibly useful” (Bohm, 1996b, p. 22),

but its power, suggests Bohm (1996b), is that dialogue "actually gets to the root of our problems and opens the way to creative transformation" (p. 27). Dialogue as a process is difficult to measure, avoids simple tracking and may not end in logical, predetermined consequences.

There are interesting connections here to the challenges we face in education. Our focus has been on neat research methods that produce clear, crisp messages, recipes, lists and models that become the products to market, buy and sell. Clear, neat packages and products are easily transportable and spoken about; easily exhibited at conferences and in blueprints for educational policy. We focus less on capturing and understanding the messy, dynamic nature of conversation and creative, emotional, responsive processes that allow us to enter into complexity and develop personal and shared meaning. This is so for the products of research as it is for the methodologies that are preferred. Law (2003) aptly refers to our avoidance of messy worlds as "intellectual hygiene" and "methodological cleanliness" (p. 3). He argues that there is an emphasis on "definiteness"; that researchers must exhibit certainty and clarity. Law (2003) contends: "If findings are vague then it isn't reality that is vague, but those doing the research. They've failed" (p. 6). In competitive markets, failure must be avoided at all costs. Beuys insists that we must be free in our learning to show our wounds, to feel and discuss our personal, social and cultural vulnerabilities, to trace and discover mistakes and to see the impact of the overall context and its forces on the individual (Harlan, 2004). Law (2003) pertinently suggests that mess, inconsistency and absence are Othered. We selectively ignore and marginalize

those aspects that get in the way of us producing something useful; something 'out-there' (Law, 2003, p. 6) rather than inside.

Stacey (2001) in his writing about complexity and emergence in organisations presents an interesting notion of dialogue that focuses less on continuity and more on dissonance. Stacey (2001) writes about "the spontaneous and paradoxically creative and destructive nature of everyday conversation" (p. 216). He suggests joint action is created through interaction that is at once competitive and cooperative, social and individual, inclusive and exclusive, caring and indifferent. Stacey (2001) argues that the "the paradox of the negative and the positive at the same time is essential to the emergence of new knowledge" (p. 235).

For me, dialogue is a *reflective grasping* (van Manen, 1990) at truth and significant meaning that is both harmonious and disruptive. It is through this sort of talk that we try ideas out, structure and organize our thinking, find out what we know and feel and reach decisions. We also express our deepest anxieties, confusions and fears through dialogue. Talk of this sort is not finished business; it is ongoing, exploratory and generative. Through dialogue we feel that we are "getting closer to the gesture of things" (Sacks, 2007b, p. 5) because, as Sacks suggests, our sensitivities and perceptions are enhanced. Through dialogue we construct meaning-full stories. Dialogue, captured and reconstructed, are traces of thinking that can shed light on complexity. Dialogue is more fragile than quantitative statistical data that masquerades in solid, fixed attire; that lulls us into a false sense of knowing. It is wispy like smoke; more difficult to grasp but real to the senses.

Collecting stories told like shells

How could I find out what was happening for these teachers as they learned in the context of their work? I began by thinking about interviews. The university Ethics Committee required me to develop a series of prompt questions that I would use in one-on-one interviews that would take place at clearly defined moments in time over the course of two years. I stipulated a process of selecting interviewees that was random and fair and involved teachers volunteering to take part. I would interview three CLPs and one of the teachers they were each working with in the first year and in the second year do the same again only with different people. I wrote letters (Statements of Intent in Plain Language) to each volunteer outlining the process and explaining my intentions. I explained that the interviews would be semi-structured and that they would take place in the school setting. I would come equipped with a tape recorder and note pad. The interviews could be expected to last for thirty minutes and interviewees could refuse to respond or discontinue the interview if they felt uncomfortable. The tapes would be transcribed by a person who would sign a statement promising confidentiality. The tapes would be kept under lock and key and any research product produced by me the researcher would be offered to the interviewees for modification. My interview questions were examined by the Ethics Committee and they considered the process and questions to be fair, clearly articulated and neatly structured. I was given permission to go ahead.

While it can be argued that such processes are protective, I soon realised their constraining nature – and just how inappropriate they were for the sort of research I wanted to engage in and learn from. Articulating research as a clearly defined, predetermined linear set of actions sanitizes and restricts the possibilities that emerge through experience. I was already meaningfully engaged in ongoing conversations with the teachers I was about to 'interview'. To shift into an artificial construct with me (as researcher/interviewer) directing the talk through prepared questions, did not feel authentic. In a general sense, I wanted to know what the experience of working with other teachers in this way was like. What was it like to have another teacher as a learning partner working with you both in and outside of the classroom? What, if anything was being learned? And what was enabling learning to occur? While I was aware of covering these key areas in my questions so that I would be able to compare and contrast responses if I wanted to, the interviews were driven more by follow up questions or tangents that arose from an interviewee's response. When I looked back at the transcripts, I became aware of a number of factors related to the process of conducting research in this way. I saw that interviewees became more relaxed in their responses as time went on, as they warmed into the talk and got thinking. I saw that my follow up questions were inspired by something that was said that interested me and that I could just as easily have focused on something else. I saw, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, that as researchers, we shape the parade of events as we study the parade (p. 87). I saw that I was doing very little sharing of myself and my views, that I was playing the role of interviewer and engaging in talk that was quite different to the talk I normally engaged in with these people. I was playing a role, were they too? If I had have collected field

notes based on our ongoing, natural dialogue in formal and informal settings, would I have found something else? I saw myself in the transcripts probing in polite ways and framing questions with other peoples' responses in mind. If one person (A) interpreted another person's actions (B) in a particular way, I framed a question for (B) to see whether their feelings and interpretations aligned. I wondered later whether this could be justified as checking validity or whether I was being plain sneaky. Looking reflexively at the process of interviewing these teachers has enabled me to think critically about the research process and has also encouraged me to come "face-to-face" with myself as a researcher (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 88).

Another important insight I gained as I read and reread the transcripts was that despite the question/answer framework, teachers were telling stories in order to make meaning from their experiences. And that I was engaged, as a researcher, in their talk because they were evoking stories that were visual, emotional and highly personal. As they talked and when I read over their words on paper, I travelled to their classrooms in my mind's eye, saw the people there, imagined their interactions, felt what they might have been feeling. Through these stories, they were finding, expressing, and exploring significant aspects about themselves, about teaching, about learning and about working together as professionals. Elbaz (1991) writes, "… the story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense" (p. 3). Teachers' knowledge is ordered by story and therefore can be best expressed and understood in this form. Elbaz (1991) believes that the formulation of story allows us to achieve an important

sense of unity and wholeness. While unity may not exist in experience itself, our telling of story allows us to create and achieve a sense of cohesion and meaning. I began to consider ways I could avoid structured interviews as a means of inquiry and explicitly frame conversations around storytelling, where teachers could be active agents (Goodson, 1992a) in the making and remaking of their professional identities.

At the end of the first year of the research project I asked the CLPs to construct a metaphor that depicted a significant aspect of their learning and to bring those metaphors to a group meeting where they could be discussed. The metaphor would in some way represent what they were discovering about learning in their professional context and would be used to provoke more dialogue. For one group of American educators trying to understand the experience of teaching, metaphor had opened up new possibilities through "the fresh space of truth-telling, humor, powerful use of language, and image that holds the paradox and complexity of the human experience" (Hagstrom et al, 2000, p. 27). I was hoping that in this context metaphor would enable the teachers to express those things that might otherwise be difficult to put into words. The search for a suitable juxtaposition can help to surface and understand what is difficult, uncertain and paradoxical. Toward the end of the second year, with a new group of CLPs, I asked teachers to come to their regular meeting having thought about what they were learning and with a story to tell that would illustrate what they wanted to say. These stories would fuel another free-flowing and unstructured conversation that I would record with my tape recorder. In this text I draw upon stories told by teachers in those meetings as well as the individual interviews.

Through the process of constructing this written text, I came to see that the three metaphors constructed by the teachers at the end of the first year could be used to frame and examine traces of experience that were shared in the first teacher interviews and in the teachers' stories told in the second year of the initiative. Using the metaphors in this way has enabled me to use three lenses, each constructed by the teachers rather than me the researcher, to examine the stories they told about their experiences. I return now to the day when we sat together in the library conference room at Sandstone Secondary College and to the teachers placing their metaphorical objects gingerly on the table.

The tightrope walker: being 'wide awake' and watched and the link to self awareness

On the table are two small poles with a fine, fragile thread running between them. Richard, who has been teaching for 16 years, and has worked as a CLP this year, holds them up, a pole in each hand, and he begins:

> *What I thought about was a tightrope. I've been thinking this year I've been out there on show, so I felt like I was part of the circus and to go over a tight rope you've got to be very balanced and you've got to think about every step that you make because with every step you might fall off in one direction or the other. You've got to be very calculated in what you're doing and what effect it's going to have. I'm forever thinking*

> *about everything I do; every step I take and what effect it's going to have and how it's going to be seen.*

This is how Richard introduces his metaphor of the tightrope walker. He is hesitant because he has agreed to share his metaphor first and because what he is saying is intensely personal. For Richard, being "on show" and "seen" by his colleagues makes him more consciously aware of what he does and the impact he has a teacher. Like the tightrope walker Richard has become 'wide awake' (Greene, 1978), self aware and deliberate in his movements, consciously considering what he does and what might be the consequences. Richard, through his metaphor, raises the uncertain, risky nature of the CLP experience and shows how difficult the process of self-assessment really is. Being in a classroom with a teacher colleague creates a heightened sense of presence and purpose but this is confronting and precarious work.

Using the pronoun 'he' to describe both genders, Greene (1973) writes:

> If he is to be effective, the teacher cannot function automatically or according to a set of predetermined rules. Teaching is purposeful action. It must be carried on deliberately in situations never twice the same. The teacher must personally *intend* to bring about certain changes in students' outlooks; he must *mean* to enable them to perform in particular ways, to do particular tasks, to impose increasingly complex orders upon their worlds. His intentions will inevitably be affected by the assumptions he makes regarding human nature and human possibility. Many of these assumptions are hidden; most have never been articulated. If he is to achieve clarity and full consciousness, the teacher must attempt to make such assumptions explicit; for only then can they be examined, analysed and understood (p. 69-70).

Greene (1973) suggests that effective teaching is purposeful, strategic and intentional. Good teachers think actively in the moment, making complex connections between peoples' needs, interests and experiences and what is to be learned. Teaching demands high levels of consciousness and being attuned to relationships. It is further complicated, as Greene implies, by the personal values, emotions, theories and assumptions that influence what we do as teachers in classrooms, sometimes unknowingly. When we look at our teaching practice, we look at ourselves. Goodson (1992b) suggests that we must "constantly remind ourselves how deeply uncertain and anxious most of us are about our work as teachers whether in classrooms or in (far less contested) lecture halls. These are often the arenas of greatest anxiety and insecurity …" (p. 113-114). Our personal and professional vulnerabilities can be brought to the surface when our teaching is under scrutiny; when our work is being analysed by others, and when we critically reflect on our practice. Goodson (1992a) argues that to put teachers' classroom practice under scrutiny, however, without considering teachers' lives, is a mistake. Divorcing practice from people and ignoring the voices of those who inhabit the contextual and shifting landscapes of classrooms, is to ignore the rich layers of meaning that contribute to what happens and how it is perceived. The anxiety and insecurity of working in classrooms with colleagues who are watching and when one is watching oneself, is evident in many of the teachers' conversations; yet by listening to teachers' personal/professional stories, we can see that being watched can also lead to insight and deeper levels of understanding.

For these teachers, who have worked for most of their careers behind closed doors in private spaces with their students, the public aspect of this initiative has been confronting. Kate, who is a CLP, says in the semi-structured interview:

> *Traditionally with teachers, whatever you do is right and whatever you do in your classroom that's what you do and what you do is right and no-one has got the right to tell you that you are not doing it the right way. It's been that very personal and closed notion.*

Kate, who has been teaching for 30 years, talks in the interview about the difference between the 'traditional' model of a teacher who regards themselves as expert rather than learner, and the way that the CLP experience challenges this notion. She talks about one of the teachers she is partnering who has *that old notion of teaching where you don't want to admit what you do is wrong. The CLP experience*, says Kate *is more about an open, sharing, reflecting, let's move on together approach. It's more focused on the students' learning … it's not 'this is my domain' and I need to build up an empire within it.* Kate feels frustration working with this partner who *just defends what she does*. For both Kate and her partner this is a tense and difficult experience because of the perception that peoples' reputations as well as their firmly held beliefs and practices are being viewed, analysed and questioned.

Kate, talking about her partnership with Simon, says:

> *I suspect he uses me a bit like a mirror in the way that Joanne (*another partner*) does. Joanne says that I am like a mirror, I don't have to say anything, she can see it all. And she just senses it by knowing that I am in her classroom.*

In the group discussion at the end of the second year of the initiative, the image of the mirror is also raised by Trent who talks about his experience as a CLP.

> *One of my partners said that it challenged his accountability and yet I didn't feel that I went in* (to his classroom) *wielding a great big stick. I thought that I went in pretty low key, in fact I think we all consciously did that. The other partner reflected in the same way but used a different analogy by saying it's like having a mirror at the back of the classroom. So straight away what it did by having another colleague present, it changed the way the teacher prepared and taught in the classroom.*

The experience enables Trent to also view himself through a mirror. He becomes more aware of the depth of knowledge he has as a teacher.

> *I've also realised, more than I give credit to, the level of experience I take into the classroom. It wasn't until we started to share, reflect and plan together that I realised the wealth of knowledge that was starting to flow out and it was like I had this huge wheel barrow just out there in front of me that I could select from …*

While this mirroring effect raises self awareness and understanding, Kate talks in the interview about her own feelings of anxiety at being viewed while she teaches. Partly, anxiety is created because she can "see" and sense the feedback she might receive from Jake without him saying a word. She sees herself through someone else's eyes, and is more critical of her practice.

> *It's about reflection, it's about looking at things from a different angle and it's good to be able to sit down and talk about what's next. I had Jake in my classroom one day and I felt that mirroring effect really well. It was rather difficult but I think about this working and I'm trying to run this class and rather than continuing with the bad approach that I had, I'm trying to take in the feedback that I can see and thinking how I can rescue myself, how I can get out of this. It made me operate differently.*

Jake, also a CLP and in a separate interview, discusses that same day:

> *I still think it has the potential to go wrong: going into someone else's class. I was watching Kate the other day, I really had the wind up her there for a while and that worries me …but she got more value out of it than I thought she would, but she still really has tried to avoid talking about what happened in that class and what I actually saw …*

In the interviews, Jake talks about another of his partners who had begun again to plan her lessons on paper.

*I found out later that she hadn't slept all weekend because she was so nervous about me coming in (*to her classroom*) and she said she felt like a first year teacher having a supervisor come in and when she got half way to school she realised she had left her notes behind and she had to turn around and drive all the way back.*

Simon, a teacher who is working with one of the CLPs, talks in an interview about his experience of the profession. Simon has been teaching for six years.

… you really get in a bit of a rut sometimes: you wake up, you have your breakfast, you go to school, you go to your pigeon hole, you open your email, then you go to class and then sometimes that can become very routine and insular.

He reflects on the CLP experience:

It's a constant reminder to think about what you are teaching and analysing it is a lot harder. It's more difficult because it is very easy to be able to say, well that didn't work well today and the kids must have had a bad day, tomorrow will be better, rather than sitting down and saying well hang on, perhaps when I actually started teaching today perhaps it was boring, perhaps it was too hard, perhaps the words I used, they just didn't understand….. I suppose there are nights when I sit back and wish I was like I was five years ago. I just accepted the fact that this was the way teaching was and if they (the students) *didn't get it, well bad luck…*

You get frustrated now that you know that they are not getting it and that you need to improve what you are actually doing, that you actually have to make the effort if you want it to work, and you know you have to make the effort because you have got that person there that suggested for you to do something. If you don't do it then I suppose you're not taking on the good advice and not learning from it and that's embarrassing.

Simon continues:

I think of what she is thinking of me … You want to make sure that people have a perception that "Yes I think he has a good handle on his class, I've walked past and the kids seem to be okay". But now that they are in your class, now that they are actually looking at what you are doing, how good is he actually? … I hope that people would view me as a good family person or a good family role model or a good father and I suppose if you had people watching what you actually did at home it would be a similar sort of thing, you would start analysing how you are treating your kids…. I reckon with Collaborative Learning Partners that what I have been able to gain from reflection through my teaching is starting to transform into my own life and you start to reflect on what you are doing in your life…You question how you do things at home. Should I be more supportive to my wife? Should I be doing some more things there? How am I approaching people in my life and at school? A whole range of things. You start analysing yourself I suppose… It's about becoming

better at what you are doing, becoming a better teacher in the classroom and I think that translates into becoming a better person.

The anxiety and uncertainty that Goodson (1992b) refers to is evident for Simon, Kate and other teachers involved in this process. They watch themselves and the impact their teaching is having on students with a more critical lens and this is uncomfortable. The relational nature of this experience creates both anxiety and self awareness. When the teachers begin to predict the thoughts of those watching them, their routined thoughts and automatic actions are questioned. The 'Other' unknowingly, unsettles and disrupts. Both Simon and Kate value the opinions of their colleagues and want to be seen as effective, professional teachers. Their sense of worth in the classroom is tied up with knowing they are doing a good job, knowing that they are making a difference through their teaching. Knowing is a relational concept. We only truly 'know' our worth through the feedback we receive from others.

I am reminded of a feisty conversation over lunch one day, when Kate wondered why our adult colleagues were able to create this 'mirroring effect' when teaching everyday with young people in the room did not inspire the same level of personal reflection and analysis. Sizer and Sizer (1999) remind us that students watch us and that "they learn from all that watching and listening" (xvii). What are we modelling? What messages are inherent in our routined practices? "The students are watching us, all the time," suggest Sizer and Sizer (1999). "We must honestly ponder what they see, and what we want them to learn from it" (p. 121). Kate's question is an important one. Why are our colleagues' opinions of us

more influential than our students' views? Why is it that we can ignore the revealing body language of young people, and not the adults who watch us in classrooms?

Senge (2000) puts a crucial point very simply: "Organisations work the way they work because of the ways that people work" (p. 19). Surfacing and analysing the ways that people think, work and interact are important first steps in fostering learning and change. If we can ignore the fact that young people are watching us in classrooms; what does that then suggest about the level of worth we associate with students and their views? Schools, like other organizations are what De Geus (1997) calls 'living companies'. We operate in the ways we do because of the powerful, sometimes unconscious mental models we hold in our heads and the complex relationships that exist between the people that work together. As Senge (2000) suggests, changing the way we think and interact involves looking within as well as looking beyond:

> We must take time to look inward: to become aware of, and study, the tacit "truths" that we take for granted, the ways we create knowledge and make meaning in our lives, and the aspirations and expectations that govern what we choose from life. But we must also look outward: exploring new ideas and different ways of thinking and interacting, connecting to multiple processes and relationships outside ourselves, and clarifying our shared visions for the organization and the larger community (p. 20).

What "tacit truths" do we ignore? What values underlie our taken-for-granted practices? Paying close attention to relational dynamics by watching in

classrooms is enabling these teachers to "see into the life of things" (Wordsworth, 1798) and become more critical in their viewing.

The CLP experience provides opportunities for teachers to look both outward at new research and approaches to teaching and learning as well as inward at themselves as thinkers and learners. Being watched in the classroom by a colleague seems to trigger, at least for some of these teachers, the capacity to look inward. I think now of the students' drawings included at the beginning of the second chapter in this text titled 'A system in need of a mind jolt' and the focus on eyes. *I look at school with only my eyes,* one student writes. *I feel like I am floating on a sea of eyes that are always watching me,* writes another student. I wonder about the power of the eyes to see into things, to reveal what is significant in our everyday experiences. I think about the word 'insight.' I consider the power of 'watching' and how it can surface our vulnerabilities. I reflect on the way we actively silence and try to ignore those who watch. As I write, I also think about yesterday when I too was reminded that I am being watched by my university students. Sometimes I forget their watching and then suddenly, I received a brutal reminder that I too am there being seen into.

My own experience of being watched

At the end of each semester our students at the university complete a survey where they make judgments on a Likert scale related to the effectiveness of their teachers and the units they are enrolled in. They are also able to justify their judgments by writing a short comment in a box on the survey. Recently, there

was an envelope in my pigeon hole that I knew contained my students' survey responses. It was a large university envelope with the logo in the right hand corner. They always come each year in envelopes like this, so I knew and grew immediately nervous. I took the envelope back to the privacy of my office and there, away from by-passers and prying eyes, I would find what my students thought of me.

My first response was not to focus on the clear sense of satisfaction with me and my course that was evident in the bar graphs within; it was to focus on the handful of clearly discontented students represented on the left hand side of the graph. I shuffled quickly through the original surveys to find the disgruntled students who were my main concern. And there in two responses were the words that kept me awake that night. Two students wrote that I was "unfair" and one of those students, in neat, deliberate handwriting had constructed two spindly but biting words: "poor teaching". I tried to reconcile this with the clear majority who wrote positive, glowing comments; but nothing could take my mind from those deeply critical words there on the paper before me.

I woke in the night and went back over the year thinking of any possible moments when I could have been construed as 'unfair'. I try hard not to disadvantage anyone in the course. There is always, I believe, openness and flexibility for people to enter into experiences in ways that they feel personally comfortable. In the night I imagine the faces of individual students. Who might have seen me as unfair? I think about a couple of Physical Education students who I have spoken to three times now about issues related to professionalism.

Had I viewed them unfairly? Did I hold biased views of Physical Education students? Did I make assumptions about these students without knowing them as individuals? Quite possibly.

I wondered whether I really was a 'poor teacher'. I tried to see myself in classrooms. Did I talk too much? Did I expect students to talk together too often? Did I focus too much on reading? Did I not assist students adequately to find meaning in texts and in their experiences? Was I too open, too flexible, not explicit enough? Did I ignore people in the classroom and focus too much on some individuals? Did I really practice and model what I said was important in teaching? Did I care, reflect, think critically, tell appropriate stories? Did I design my own lessons so that all students could build understanding? Clearly not.

In the cold, crisp air the following morning, I walked my dog in the half light. I decided to talk to my students and tell them about my anxiety, my confusion, and my self-doubts. They too would soon be receiving regular feedback from their own students and school based colleagues. Many would be working in team teaching situations in schools. Some would have lessons filmed to enable them to watch their own teaching and decide on areas for improvement. They would all understand from their own experiences this year as pre-service teachers, what it feels like to be watched by experienced teachers in classrooms. I would open up a discussion. Why do we feel anxious when we are conscious of being watched in classrooms? Why do we forget that our students are watching always? How do we respond when students and other teachers tell us what they think? How do

we deal with the gap between our theories and our practice? With this plan in mind, I began to feel more at ease; in fact I began to look forward to such a discussion; to modelling an honest, inquiring approach. And to asking students to tell me more about what they saw of me in classrooms.

I began to realise that those two students' comments did much more to stretch my thinking about my teaching than any of the positive responses. The positive responses told me what I thought I knew and did not prompt me to engage in self reflection. The more judgmental comments made me question my knowing and think harder about the gaps between my personal theories and behaviour. They opened my eyes to what others might legitimately see.

My students had just returned from teaching placements in schools and a number of them had experienced difficult relationships with their teacher mentors and received feedback that left them feeling uncomfortable. I decided to use my own experience to open up a discussion about being watched, the emotions involved and the reflective thinking and self assessment that can be prompted through such experiences. I also wanted to model for my students, by talking honestly about my own feelings, how the relationships we develop as professionals can reveal our vulnerabilities as well as enable us to learn powerfully about ourselves and our teaching. After the session I received a number of responses from students. This email message (used with permission), sent by Tina (not her real name), was typical:

Hi Amanda,

I thought it was a brave thing to discuss the negative feedback you have received with us. Thank you for doing this. It has encouraged me to 'embrace' the good with the bad feedback (I certainly get both!) and use it constructively

Sandra (Tina's mentor teacher) *encouraged us to have a feedback session with our students toward the end of our placement. I knew I would get some bad feedback, but before I had read it, I made sure to say something positive and personal to each student individually. This was very difficult! But it was amazingly reparative for me to know I had made some amends before I got emotional and affronted by the negative feedback. Kind of Buddhist, kind of self righteous! What might I have said if I had read the feedback first?*

So thanks, for demonstrating the sort of courage we need to have when we are 'out there'.

Tina

Being watched by students and other teachers (and being aware of that watching) is different to being filmed by a camera. When people are involved it is the complex relational dynamics that have the potential to build deeper levels of professional learning. In a recent study Raider-Roth (2005) found that "self-assessment was a process that could help uncover the intricate dynamics of relationships that play out in children's learning in school" (p. 9). Raider-Roth

(2005) argues that the students involved in her research project were not examining themselves as learners in a neutral-free zone; rather "students were looking at their own learning in the context of the relationships with their teachers and peers" (p. 9). She explains: "In talking about their "selves", the students described the notion of self as a complex relational construct" (p. 9). Raider-Roth (2005) examines the relationship between trust and learning and shows how crucial it is for students to trust their personal knowledge and those around them so that they can enhance understanding. "It is the relationships among all who participate," she states, "that determines the quality of learning" (p. 14). This seems to also be the case for teachers. Being involved in the CLP initiative encourages teachers to self-assess but they do this within a complex web of interwoven relationships between people and experiences. In order for deeper levels of learning to occur for all in school settings, the 'relational landscape' that Raider-Roth (2005) refers to must be attended to. The goal of self-assessment is therefore not to improve the autonomous self (which is the goal of video taping teachers in classrooms for themselves to view); but to enhance the relational self through relational experiences.

Smyth (2007) also argues for "reinstating relationships as the fundamental core of what it is that schools do" (p. 222-223). A "relational view of teaching", Smyth (2007) suggests, "might better inform approaches to teacher development in place of the managerialist and marketized ones informing current policy reforms" (p. 223). Smyth (2007) is distressed at the apparent ignorance of policy makers to understand the "relational essence" of schooling; meanwhile many young people "physically, psychologically and emotionally withdraw from a meaningful

educational experience at school" (p. 224). When more meaningful learning relationships based on respect, trust and sensitivity are constructed between teachers through professional learning experiences; the way is paved for more meaningful learning relationships to be developed between teachers and young people.

"Seeing the other" and "feeling seen" are important aspects in the development of mutual empathy (Surrey, 1991) and trust. Trent, one of the CLPs in the second year of the initiative, said that working closely with a colleague in the classroom led him to see that person differently and know them in more personal and meaningful ways.

> *I think whenever you share an experience with someone, you look upon that person in a different way, it's like when you meet a person for the first time you're never quite sure how you will interact and how you can build a relationship, that's why one of the teaching tools we use in classrooms is to put kids in small groups and to mix those learning groups so then kids look upon each other in different ways and share their experiences. Because we have been involved in a partnership with colleagues, we look upon each other with different eyes. You've shared something, you've shared and reflected and acted and planned and hopefully achieved together.*

Knowing one another and building trusting learning relationships must be at the heart of professional learning experiences for teachers that aim to create deeper

levels of learning. Only then will teachers feel more able to engage in the difficult, risky business of challenging and building upon what they know.

The warped shell: the 'dirty' nature of relational learning

"I've got a shell," says Anna and she places a beautiful, white, spiral shaped shell on the laminex table in the library discussion room.

> *My involvement in the CLP program is like looking at the shell from inward to outward so that we're aware that this small point of origin opens out ever wider. I feel that this maps my journey in thinking about the implications of the Framework. I'm applying it to my own teaching, but opening out in the sharing process with people. It's expanding my awareness and hopefully their awareness of how we can improve learning for students. And it continues on like the development of the shell. It's an expanding process, a developmental process. There's a continuity to it and from my own point of view, I've felt that there's also a kind of holistic approach where I've felt a lot of different threads were tying together…. although in some ways the shell doesn't fit. I think I need to find something that represents a warped development.*

Anna looks for a moment at the shell and turns it in her hands.

> *But there are ridges here and a kind of warp here, so maybe the shell does show this. The tightrope works differently for me. It's not that I feel that I*

have to get everything right, or that I'm on show, but the tensions created by people are there for me. I just wish that everybody picked up and flew with the ideas.

For Anna, who has been teaching for 28 years, learning in her professional context is an ongoing, active, developmental process; however, it is not linear, easy nor mechanical. While we may not have a single theory to describe all the different types of learning we may do, according to Stoll, Fink & Earl (2003) what we do know is that learning is a complex, ambiguous process.

> Learning is intellectual, social and emotional. It is linear and erratic. It happens by design and by chance. We all do it and we take it for granted, even though we do not have a clear understanding of what it means or how to make the most of it (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003, p. 24).

Anna tries to capture the paradoxical, difficult nature of her learning in the CLP experience through the metaphor of the warped shell. She is finding that professional learning in this social context is rewarding and enlightening as well as difficult and uncomfortable. Anna's description reminds me of Papert's metaphorical description of learning. Papert (1993), a well known cognitive constructivist uses the film *Dirty Dancing* to build two different conceptions of learning: "clean" learning and "dirty" learning. "Clean" learning is more formulaic, less emotional, more transactional, whereas the notion of 'dirty' embodies the personal, the intuitive, the unspoken, the ambiguous, the cultural and the social. Anna would perhaps relate to the notion of learning as 'dirty'.

She would say that the process of learning is sometimes smooth and symmetrical like our first impressions of the shell; but more frequently it is 'warped'.

In her role as a CLP working to facilitate learning with other teachers, she is frustrated by those she perceives as less enthusiastic and not open to change. She says:

> *I sit back and think yep, as an old bird I can hand over and there are so many good ideas out there in the young minds. These kids are doing some great teaching. And then there are others that you think, no, you're stalling or you're not progressing yourself and as a consequence nor are your classes and that creates tension for me.*

Anna seems to categorise the teachers she works with into two distinct camps: either they are keen to learn or they are not and those who are not, are frustrating and difficult to work with. Such distinctions are frequently made about students too. In education we often create such boundaries around people in order to more easily explain, justify and understand. When we think about learning as being 'dirty'; however, we are less likely to rigidly position people and more likely to look at the complexity of aspects that surround a person's actions in any given context. In the interviews, Jake and Kristina's stories highlight the 'dirty', messy nature of learning; yet like Anna's shell, there is positive development amongst moments of warped intensity.

Jake, who is one of the CLPs works with Kristina who teaches Food Technology. I interviewed both Jake and Kristina on separate occasions but their stories interconnect in interesting ways. Kristina believes that participating in this professional learning process *has been good to get suggestions from a totally different point of view because what I assume, other people don't*. She sees the value of working with Jake as *just running things past him really.* In the interview she says that she does not mind having another teacher in her classroom: *No, I don't mind. I think it's really good to have somebody in there. I would just go about it as I would normally do it. What you see is what you get. No, it doesn't faze me at all.*

Jake sees things differently. Here he talks in the interview about his work with Kristina.

> *I have a very strong feeling with this one particular teacher that she didn't want me in her classroom and that it wasn't appropriate. She didn't actually say that, but it was always there, something that I felt rather than something that she said.*

Based on his intuitive responses, Jake devises a strategy for helping Kristina to become more comfortable.

> *I had been getting her used to me coming into the room by just using the room as a passageway, as it's got two doors, so I walk through there five,*

six, seven, eight, ten times a day and stop and talk to kids or chat to her … so I just become this regular feature wandering in and out.

Kristina talks at length in the interview about the difficulties she faces with student behaviours in her Food Technology class. Jake, who has witnessed these behaviours, says in the interview that he suggested Kristina use some alternative teaching strategies in the classroom. This is not necessarily what Kristina recognises; instead she focuses on the relief she feels that someone is finally acknowledging the difficulties she experiences. The students' behaviour has been seen and someone else, at long last, has recognised how difficult teaching has become for her.

Very few staff pop in to see how it's going and I didn't really feel that anyone knew the intricacies of running my class. Just some of the comments people make that it's easy. And it was very evident when Jake came in and he was appalled, and he wondered why I was still sane.

Kristina describes the difficulties she faces in the classroom:

It used to be just one or two in classes that were troublesome, but now we are looking at five, six, seven or eight in the class and you haven't got anywhere to put them, there is just not enough space to keep them isolated. ……They have very unstable homes. They bring all their problems to school and we have to sort them out, and this is what the

cause of a lot of the disruption in class is, because a lot of them are from this area and they're all intermingled in some way.

Later in the interview she says:

These kids just disrupt everything because they disrupt every class. And there is no where to take them. It is all very well to say that you can take them out and put them somewhere but who is going to look after them? What are we going to give them? We just don't have the resources and a lot of it was literacy.

Kristina's negative and defensive feelings about the problems she faces in her classroom dominate. Her story shows a loss of faith in a system that she believes has abandoned her. Consequently, she has lost faith in some students and their capacity to learn. These feelings act as a powerful lens through which she views her teaching experience. She feels unsupported, unsure about how to deal with students' challenging behaviours and believes that other teachers and school leaders fail to understand and acknowledge her situation. Jake said that one of his initial strategies to take the focus away from teaching issues that seemed too personal and confronting, was to focus on the worksheets that were being used in class. In the interview Jake explains:

We started looking at some of the worksheets she was using and whether they were appropriate or not and I was looking at them and thinking no they weren't, they were assuming that every kid was at the same literacy

> *level and there were seven or eight kids in the class that were functioning, not just low, but beyond low, so their behaviour was reflecting their lack of engagement.*

As a consequence of this, Jake suggested a new literacy strategy. The strategy involved some of the students not writing instructions directly from the whiteboard as they were used to doing, but instead being given the instructions broken down into separate sentences and written on different slips of paper. The students would read the sentences and like a jigsaw puzzle, place them in a logical order. This would ensure that the students were meaningfully and actively involved in making sense of the instructions as they pieced them together. Jake went into the classroom to see how the students were coping with the new strategy.

> *I only went in for that bit of the lesson, when they were doing the worksheet stuff. I would come in and have a look and see how it's going and then we'd sit down afterwards and say, well, how did that go? Did that work? And what we found was that the simple literacy activities that we gave the kids worked … There was a lot of positive feel there, they* (the students) *felt they had actually got the work done this time and the feeling of the teacher was "hey, look this works, this literacy strategy has actually achieved the goal".*

In the interview with Kristina, I ask whether her teaching strategies changed as a consequence of working with Jake. She replies:

Probably, it might have been with the year eights. He said something about breaking down the … I had some sheets and he said they did it some other way. He happened to see something, and I just modified the sheets I had because I thought perhaps that it is a bit too detailed for the kids, so it was just a comment that he made, but I can't bring anything else to mind, but I know that quite a few times he just commented. I said something and he jokingly said something, and it just jogged another idea that I could try and redo.

Kristina believes the most positive difference that was made was when Jake removed the difficult students from her class. While this may not have enabled her to build strategies for working effectively with disengaged students, she was pleased that finally someone was acknowledging her difficulties and providing assistance.

Probably when he took the students, that was the biggest thing because he took them out several weeks in a row and we were able to get on with our work, that was the biggest … that was the greatest thing that has ever happened, because nobody has ever come in to assist in any way in all the years that I have been teaching.

I ask Kristina what Jake did with the students he took from her class.

> *He took them off to play footy one day, they just had to get rid of their energy. He took them down to the Drama room and they just ran themselves ragged … he just removed them out there and they got rid of their energy.*

Jake tells a different story:

> *We decided one of the only ways she was going to deliver some of the stuff she wanted to do was for me to remove those kids, so my role became disciplinary in the sense that I'm going to take them away. We played literacy games and cooking games when I took them away. The next week we organised a BBQ with the five of them and they had to cook and prepare me a BBQ on the BBQ outside. That they really enjoyed because they had to negotiate with me what they were going to cook and how they were going to do it …. They had some real ownership over their BBQ and they invited their friends to come too.*

Peoples' stories, the narrative and conversational accounts of their experience are layered with personal and relational subjectivities, just as my own listening and questioning is influenced by the relationships I have with the people I am interviewing. When I was interviewing Jake and Kristina, I remember wanting to get to the 'truth' of the situation and posing leading questions. What did Jake *really* do with the students he took out of Kristina's class? Who *really* came up with the idea of trying new strategies to enhance the students' literacy? Did the students *really* learn by using this strategy? At the time I thought my role as

researcher was similar to that of a detective; I was looking for an account of the events as they actually happened. In this search for 'truth' I found myself believing one person more than another; making judgments based on who seemed less emotionally affected. How else could I evaluate the CLP experience and its impact on teachers if I did not look for 'truths'? I now see, as Bruner (1986) suggests, that "stories have no such need for testability" (p. 14). Bruner (1986) argues that our stories exist in two landscapes simultaneously. One is the landscape of action and the other is the landscape of consciousness (p. 14). When Jake and Kristina tell the stories of their experience, they reach for narrative as a cultural tool to help them to construct meaning based on what they do and their interpretations of what happened. What matters most is the story as it is constructed; this is where the complicated nature of thinking and learning reside. Kristina tells the story of a competent, experienced teacher who is unable to encourage a new breed of students to behave well in her classrooms; a teacher who desperately wants these difficulties to be recognised so that she can receive assistance and do her job well. This storyline is more pressing than any other story connected to her professional learning. It is a story that must be told and listened to because it is genuine and influential. Jake tells the story of a teacher who is responsible for helping another teacher build better understandings of teaching and learning processes. Jake wants to show, through the stories he tells, that he is making a difference. He points to the emotional and intellectual support he offers to both Kristina and her students. He too wants to be seen as doing his job well.

Relational dynamics are central in both Jake and Kristina's learning. When relationships are dysfunctional, the emotional turmoil involved acts as a block to good teaching and to effective learning. Perkins (1995) refers to reactions like these as 'ego defense'.

> Most of us surely seek to defend and overdefend viewpoints about the world that lie close to our conceptions of ourselves and our roles in relation to others…..When my position is at stake, I am more likely to be hasty – after all, I already know what I think, so why think more? I am more likely to be narrow – I do not even *want* to ponder the other side of the case. I am more likely to be fuzzy – my own view seems to fit together nicely, so why should I probe it for confusions and incoherences (p. 165)?

Anger and other defensive emotions, contends Perkins (1995), are adaptations for survival. They give us energy to defend what we hold dear. They give us confidence in times of insecurity. They focus us on external battles rather than help us engage in the more difficult terrain of thinking reflectively. Anna may think of Kristina as a teacher who defends what she does and fails to open herself up to new learning; yet even though it is difficult to gauge which elements impacted on which outcomes, it can be argued that both teachers and students in this situation all gained positively from increased opportunities to learn. Without Jake's sensitivity, this may not have occurred.

Bohm (1996b) argues that in society, in government, in organizations, we need to be more sensitive. Sensitivity according to Bohm (1996b) is "a certain way of knowing how to come in and how not to come in, of watching all the subtle cues and the senses and your responses to them – what's happening inside of you,

what's happening in the group" (p. 45). The CLP initiative relies on sensitivity – this is a central component that enables professional learning of this kind to work effectively. When one is sensitive, according to Bohm (1996b), one is able to perceive meaning and see how meaning is developed through subtle verbal and non-verbal cues. Bohm (1996b) suggests that generally we are not sensitive to others and able to think well together. Sensitivity is blocked, according to Bohm (1996b) because people hold firmly to personal assumptions and established views:

> What blocks sensitivity is the defense of your assumptions and opinions. But if you are defending your opinions, you don't judge yourself and say, "I shouldn't be defending." Rather, the fact is that you are defending, and you then need to be sensitive to that – to all the feelings in that, all the subtle nuances (p. 47).

In talking about a potentially difficult relationship with a teacher partner, George a CLP in the second year of the initiative, said:

> *I reckon for change, for reflection, for all these accountability things there's one thing you need and that's affirmation. With my partners there had to be a process where what was actually happening for most of the time in the classroom was affirmed – it was going well. You can send these messages in a variety of ways. Then when you've established some equality and equity and you feel comfortable, then what happens is that you begin to look at the new possibilities. You send a message to your partner that you value them and you affirm their existence in the classroom as a viable teacher. That affirmation is really important for teachers … that's the value of having a collaborator in the classroom with*

you because they can send these messages and they're very powerful. The money ain't enough to make us feel good all the time, so those sorts of messages are very important.

For George mutual recognition, affirmation, care and respect are fundamental and lead the way to positive interaction, the spawning of new possibilities and learning. What emerges through these stories is the centrality of relationships to professional learning; of the complex social processes and sensitivities that over time enable us to form trusting relationships so that learning can occur.

Everything comes back to my garden

On the table is a photograph of Kate's garden. She holds it up and suddenly she changes her mind. *You'll have to come over to the window*, she says. And we all move out of our chairs, away from the blue laminex tables, toward the large window that overlooks the garden and we see the ancient cypress trees and the rambling garden beds and some newly planted shrubs. In moving us to the window, Kate creates a "process of exchange and negotiation" (Bruner, 1986, p. 132). Kate's notion of the garden is entered into by the others so that through the dialogue it becomes "an exercise of collectivity" (Bruner, 1986, p. 132) where through language, knowing is transmitted and shaped.

Kate: *Everything comes back to my garden. I spend a lot of time in my garden and it reminds me of learning. What you get are a few weeds that decide where they're going to grow and how they're*

going to grow and as much as I hate that onion weed over there that's dying, there are other people that grow pots of onion weed. It takes on a life of its own and continues to grow. There's that business of nurturing and feeding and some individuals will grow in one direction, like the trees will grow in one direction, and others will grow in a different direction and you try and train and prune it and feed it, but in the end a lot of it's up to the individual and what they will choose to take in from what you offer.

Richard: *I'm just trying to work out the analogy of that ivy over there that's strangling the living daylights out of that tree.*

Kate: *The ivy itself is thriving. Some people cultivate ivy. I walked out the back the other day and I saw this ivy on the fence and I thought, someone wrote a book once called 'Who the bloody hell planted that thing?' and I look at this creeper with white flowers, the ivy down the back, and sometimes the things we find are nuisances, they've got a beauty in themselves that we don't recognise until we look for the right spot for it.*

Anna: *Maybe I'm seeing things darkly at the moment, but I would say, okay you've got a virulent weed that's taking over that is really destroying the framework and if you don't work on the ivy and you allow it to go its own way, like teachers who aren't prepared to be*

changed by the Framework …. You've got to be mighty stringent with ivy, otherwise it will dictate.

Richard: *Cut it out at the roots.* (Every one laughs).

Anna: *Or you've got to mow and clip it and say, 'you're okay there as a ground cover, but stay there! Don't get up that tree because you're killing the framework of the darn thing and it's not going to flower and flourish'.*

Kate: *You can only shape to a certain extent. You can encourage. Pulling weeds out is like trying to get rid of the bad bits and nurturing the good bits. The bad bits will keep coming back.*

Anna: *You can have a happy garden that's tolerant of bad bits; you can be tolerant of bad bits of teaching. You're never going to get everything absolutely tidy, but the beauty of the Framework can be developed most if there's tolerance along with the vision of what we're really wanting in the design and not allowing the take over, rampant kind of 'I'm doing my own thing' kind of approach.*

Kate: *Someone needs to be the landscaper.*

Richard: (Smiling). *I've got my electric shears at home; hedge clippers. I'll bring them in and show you how everything can be shaped up*!

Kate: *It's been a journey – growth, changing, developing in one direction, then in different directions. And one thing leads to another. One idea can be the seed of another idea and sometimes seeds come up that are totally from nowhere. Like poppies. You might have red poppies one year and then suddenly in the same patch are these purple frilly ones and no one knows where they came from. Obviously they've got a parent in their somewhere; they've had some seed that's worked together in developing them.*

The metaphor of the garden acts like a container within which understandings and beliefs are presented, contested and developed. The use of metaphor can be revealing in non-threatening ways. Through the metaphor and her examination of the onion weed, Kate raises the danger of labelling teachers in narrow, simplistic ways as resistant, or useless, or difficult. It is common in professional development literature to categorise teachers into polarized groups. They are reformers or resisters, unmotivated or motivated, innovators or followers, leaders or underperformers, allies or enemies. Kate suggests that teachers are seen in narrowly defined contained ways through lenses coloured by certain assumptions, priorities and viewpoints. This experience has enabled her to understand the complexity inherent in professional learning for teachers and the danger in rigidly classifying peoples' responses. Kate acknowledges the importance of divergence and subversion and how we do not immediately see the real value of ideas that are different or difficult. She understands the value of processes that foster collaboration, where ideas build upon other ideas, where meaningful and creative

connections are made when diverse elements come together. Her image of a garden where competing and cooperating species thrive, where there is both harmony and disharmony, indifference and passion is paradoxical and necessary. Stacey (2001) argues that "the paradox of the negative and the positive at the same time is essential to the emergence of new knowledge" (p. 235). Kate's metaphor of the garden seems to suggest that she has come to understand the importance of paradoxical processes that both obstruct and create new learning.

The tensions inherent in efforts to shape a culture in particular ways are clear in the conversation as it develops. The teachers express, through the metaphor, the frustration they feel when their colleagues do not take part with enthusiasm; when they seem to resist new learning. They talk with irony and humour about how easy it would be if everyone participated in manageable, positive ways; if they had the power to manipulate people so that their behaviours could be controlled; if things could only be tidy. They see some danger in allowing rogue influences to take their own direction and gain strength. The themes in this conversation are those that have been prevalent in political, religious and business conversations throughout time. When a single approach, an emergent idea or a group of people is seen to be good and right, diverse pathways and approaches are discouraged and even regarded as dangerous.

Noddings (2005) points to the importance of restoring the moral purpose of schooling so that young people conceive schools as "centres of care – places where they are cared for and will be encouraged to care deeply themselves" (p. 65). While her focus is on creating caring school communities so that *students*

can learn deeply; it seems obvious that the notion of care is also relevant for teachers and their learning. When teachers work and learn within a culture of care, their learning is also deepened and lines of division can be broken down. Noddings (2005) suggests that:

> Part of what children need to learn is that groups need not be accepted or rejected wholly. Something in the way we educate induces our children to suppose that persons and groups must be either right or wrong – good guys or bad guys. Along with this simplistic notion of human moral status, they often come to believe that loyalty requires total acceptance or rejection. …. We learn party lines and begin to divide the world into we and they, us and them. One of the school's most serious shortcomings is that it so consistently induces and maintains the creation of rivals and enemies" (p. 54).

When we care, we feel deeply and we respond sensitively, intelligently and cautiously. The connections we experience matter. We listen, observe and adhere to more actively. We are aware of ourselves and how me might be judged and perceived; and we are aware of the other: their needs, desires and interests. When we care, we purposely try to avoid harm, and when harm occurs, we work to repair the damage.

Smyth (2007) powerfully suggests:

> Unless schools can reinvent themselves as more hospitable and humane places (McQuillan, 1997), then the conditions necessary to engage young people in learning will not be brought into existence, and for young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, this will mean a continuing inability or unwillingness to construct an academic identity that we know to be crucial to learning (p. 227).

Smyth (2007) and Smyth & Fasoli (2007) argue that schools are fundamentally relational in nature. Smyth (2007) suggests that the direction in educational policy is 'wrongheaded' (p. 228). It assumes, according to Smyth (2007) that teachers can not be trusted and that the only way to improve schools is by insisting they comply with externally set standards as well as 'market forces' that drive schools, teachers and students to compete against one another for rewards. Smyth (2007) passionately suggests that "supposed remedies" are "having the effect of literally gouging the heart and soul out of teaching and learning" (p. 228).

Kate's garden reveals the importance of 'relational power' (Raider-Roth, 2005). The garden exists as a collection of seeded possibilities. Beauty is created through the contrasts and compatibility of individual plants and through the connections created between small components. It is always shifting in relation to shape, texture and colour. Gardens change and develop but even as new growth is generated, small remnants of previous seasons remain. We can look afresh at gardens at different transformational stages and always see new potential. The garden is a culture continually in the process of creating itself but will thrive more positively when certain conditions are in place. The labour-intensive garden that is tamed into rigid routine and mechanical rows lacks humanity and is soon overlooked because it is always the same. The garden that continually evolves through creativity and care is one that will continue to amaze and inspire.

Chapter Five

Nurturing the rhizome: empowering teachers through meaning-full learning

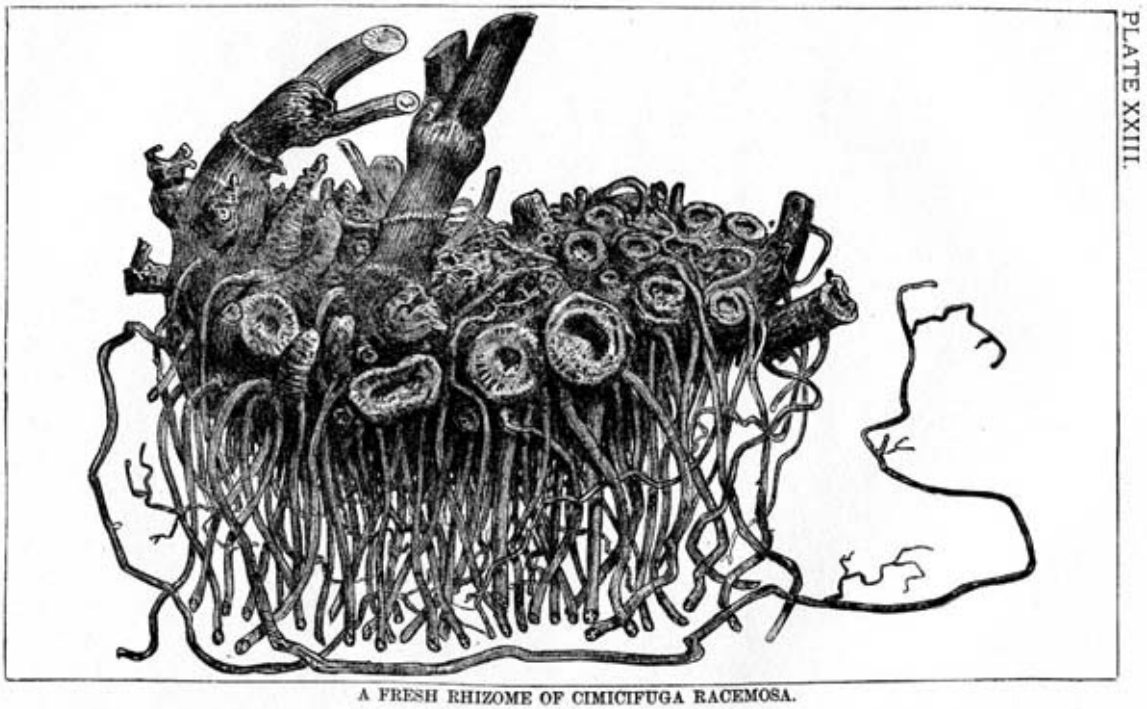


PLATE XXIII.

A FRESH RHIZOME OF CIMICIFUGA RACEMOSA.
(Natural Size.)

Meaning is not static – it is flowing. And if we have the meaning being shared, then it is flowing among us: it holds the group together.

Bohm (1996b, p. 46)

Context: The meeting room, Department of Education and Training, Regional Office, 2005

The room is small and square and contains one round table and six office chairs. The walls are painted light blue and there is probably dark blue carpet on the floor. There is nothing on the walls but paint. There is nothing in this space but the office furniture and us. There is no window. It is a bureaucratic space that has a functional purpose. There are no distractions; no evidence of the human hand at work. The space facilitates short conversations away from the open plan office where people sit at desks and talk over shoulders. We meet regularly in this space because it is convenient. Susan works here. We always shut the door. We meet to discuss Susan's learning as she progresses through a unit in the Master of Education course. I think we shut the door because we always begin our meetings by sharing what's happening in schools and talking about the people we work with. Sometimes we speak in hushed whispers; sometimes our voices are loud and raucous; sometimes we laugh at the madness of our professional worlds; sometimes we speak admiringly of colleagues doing interesting things in schools. Our stories undermine the cold blue bureaucracy of the space and refuse to be constrained.

The dialogue, as always, is full of meaning. We weave between personal memories, fragments taken from research papers, ideas and conceptual understandings, notes made in journals, metaphors and visual representations, reflective thoughts about thinking, feelings about ourselves, other people and our work. We span out in our thinking, stretching threads as far as we can take them in the moment; we dig deeper in our desire to understand; we abandon some threads and do not return to them. We talk aloud our mental processes which open the way to something else. Each time we meet, we converse like this. We slip between conscious intention and explicitness and something more intuitive, tentative, personal and hazy. We construct the story as we go, at times purposefully and at other times travelling with a tangent simply because it feels right or good to do so. The meaning we make during this professional learning

experience is non-static; it moves in unreliable, unpredictable directions because it is shared.

As a researcher/writer/teacher I am interested in the self organizing and evolving nature of dialogue and the understandings that emerge from it that can not be predetermined. I am interested in the different voices we use to discuss our social and professional experiences and the sorts of voices that are privileged above others. I am interested in the nature of narrative: how it "is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation" (Richardson, 1990, p. 21). I am interested in the different spaces within which we talk and think and the relationship between the symbolic artefacts in the professional landscape and the people who work there. I am interested in further examining the relational nature of learning and the implications for teachers and their professional development. I am interested in the nature of professional learning experiences that are full of meaning: what makes them so? In this chapter I will examine another contextual learning experience; an experience that began with me as supervisor of a Master of Education student, that spiralled into an experience that involved many others. The experience came to look like a complex network of associations, connections and offshoots whose power lay in the network itself rather than with any one individual. The image of the rhizome helped us to consider the nature of our learning during this experience and to see that expansive, generative processes are worth fostering and nurturing because they are inherently meaning-full. In an attempt to capture the complexity of this living network, I use the writing process to represent and construct different voices and perspectives. My intention is to write a *collective story* (Richardson, 1990, p. 36); to draw attention to the rich connections inherent in this entangled web of experiences by foregrounding multiple voices and the connections between them.

Learning in the postgraduate context

The learning experience was more formally set in motion through a university accredited Master of Education unit titled 'Negotiated Study'. I refer to this time as an 'experience' but do not mean to imply that the events, responses, interactions and emotions surrounding this time, were contained and structured

by clear starting and end points. No contextual 'experience' is free from the past or anticipations of the future. There is continuity between experiences even though we might think of them as being separate. As Dewey (1934) suggests, "In life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges" (p. 17). Experiences, which are felt as "heightened vitality" (Dewey, 1934, p. 18) are created by what the participants bring and how they interact within a particular context. We actively and jointly construct experience but as Boud and Miller (1996) suggest, individuals take away their own interpretations based on their unique way of viewing the world:

> Each individual is attuned to some aspects of the world and not to others, and this affects his or her focus and response. Learners attach their own meanings to events even though others may attempt to impose their definitions on them. The meaning of experience is not given; it is open to interpretation. The major influence on the way learners construct their experience is the cumulative effect of their personal and cultural history (Boud & Miller, 1996, p. 9).

Experiences that purposely aim to foster learning are often artificially constructed with certain principles and intentions in mind. Learning experiences like those we create in schools and tertiary institutions are artificially bound and contained by time and place, and often constrained by externally devised outcomes and performance measures. As a teacher, I am challenged by the need to frame experiences that allow learners to construct their own understandings through socially and culturally rich experiences, that enable learners to share and build their understandings with others, as well as develop personal insight into how meaning is shaped.

I was invited to work as 'supervisor' for a teacher/student who had selected this unit in her final year of a Master of Education through course work. I was keen to do this, not only because I knew the student and admired her as an educator but also because the openness of the 'negotiated' unit meant we could construct the learning experience collaboratively rather than be tied to tasks devised by someone else at some other time. The student devised a topic based on questions she had been considering for some time. The assessment task we negotiated as part of the successful completion of the unit involved the student organizing a

forum that other local educators were invited to attend. The forum, attended by nearly 30 educators, was organised by the student so that participants would experience and consider through active processes, some of the significant ideas the student was encountering through her research. The experience is worthy of close analysis because many of the teachers who came to be involved claimed that this experience was a more profound professional learning experience than others they had encountered. What was it about the nature of this experience that made it so intense, I wondered? As someone new to the supervisory experience, I was keen to develop my understandings of what learning looks like for teachers studying at a postgraduate level and to understand more about ways in which deeper learning processes can be fostered for teachers.

The open and flexible nature of the negotiated learning experience caused me to question the role I was supposed to play as 'supervisor'. The term implies overseeing and direction setting (Green & Lee, 1999; Barron & Zeegers, 2002). It is assigned to someone who strategically binds the experience by reinforcing certain procedures and behaviours; someone who is responsible for ensuring that requirements are understood and met according to prearranged standards. The relationship between supervisor and student is essentially hierarchical and influenced by predetermined rules and boundaries that are often further emphasised in university literature and supervision training programs (Barron & Zeegers, 2002). There are even those (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2004) who see supervision as "the best way to ensure that your own work echoes down to the next generation and beyond" (p. 1). The role is defined, students are labelled and parameters set in an abundance of 'how to' manuals and guides for success. Holbrook and Johnston (1999) suggest that such manuals and guides "are books of practical, clearly explained, and specifically situated advice. They are about decontextualised and resolved situations, not complex, messy reality. They give an impression of good management and control" (p. 7).

In a recent seminar program organised by the university that I work in, an external presenter was employed to work with university lecturers across discipline areas in a workshop titled 'Supervision strategies: Bringing out the best in your student'. The approach taken in this workshop suggests that the

complexities of supervision can be reduced to a list of disconnected and decontextualised strategies. It suggests a 'how to' technical approach to teaching that has been questioned by teacher educators who argue that an emphasis on reflective practice and inquiry better equips graduates for a complex and demanding profession (Darling- Hammond, 2000; Reid & O'Donoghue, 2001). The workshop title assumes that supervisors have shared understandings of what 'best' product might look like. It assumes too that the relationship between the supervisor and student is hierarchical. The title suggests that the post-graduate student is owned and manipulated rather than an active creator of knowledge, capable of making choices and taking responsibility. Discourses related to supervision have traditionally, and still do, reinforce outdated metaphors of education as production and cure. As Cook-Sather (2003) writes, "In its emphasis on all that is mechanical, efficient, repetitive, standard, and passive the metaphor of education as production all but eliminates things imaginative, creative, various, divergent, and active" (p.2, online). Where the relationship between 'supervisor' and student is narrowly defined and based on mechanistic processes, there is little room to regard teaching as possibility (Greene, 1997) and little room to regard professional learning as a process that develops among other things, personal empowerment (Spady, 2001).

How supervisors enter into the experience of 'supervising' has an impact on what happens in the course of a student's progress. Burns, Lamm and Lewis (1999) conducted research into the processes and experiences involved in the supervision of postgraduate education students. They found that supervisors were influenced by two sources of induction: "formal guidelines and their own experience as a student" (p. 65); and that there were few opportunities for briefing supervisors and discussing supervision. They conclude that "many supervisors simply learn on the job" (p. 65).

My entry into academia was not through the traditional manner. I did not have formal research experience in education through tertiary study; my Masters degree was completed in the area of literary studies. The educational research I had engaged in was within the school contexts in which I worked, as a part of my work, rather than for publication. I operated in intuitive ways fuelled by

curiosity and the desire to work closely with others. I used narrative as a means of organising my experiences and interpreting the experiences of others. I had never heard of narrative as a research methodology. I just knew through experience that narrative enabled me to build understanding. No one has ever taught me to do a literature review and I always avoid reading them. I came to academia with one foot in the university and the other foot still firmly grounded in schools. I received no formal induction into the process of supervision. This has meant that my experiences in schools and, in particular, what I see happening in classrooms, colours my work as an academic working in the field of education. I entered these supervisory experiences naïve about some of the academic traditions and expectations and influenced more by a deep desire to engage in and understand thinking and learning. Schön (1987) writes that learning to do research means "learning to think like a practitioner in the field." I've never stopped doing that! Why then do I feel like an impostor?

Connell (1985) suggested some time ago that "supervising a research higher degree is the most advanced level of teaching in our education system. It is certainly one of the most complex and problematic" (p. 38). As Green and Lee (1999) point out, Connell's description of postgraduate research supervision was important because "it put on the agenda a distinctively *educational* orientation" (p. 209). More recently a focus on the relationship between supervision and pedagogical practices has helped to highlight teaching and learning issues and has been particularly useful for those of us in education who want to use our experiences with higher degree study to learn more about learning, thinking and the implications for teaching. As Holbrook and Johnston (1999) suggest there is still much more work to be done in this area.

The complexity is further enhanced when we consider what it means to be a postgraduate student in the field of education. Holbrook and Johnston (1999) suggest that, "students in education have had a different profile to other postgraduate students" (p. 10). Holbrook and Johnston (1999) contend that education students are more likely to want to develop professional expertise than move into the academic arena. They are more likely to be older and studying part-time and "often come to postgraduate research with extensive professional

experience and with strong views about the practical questions they wish to research" (p. 10). More flexible approaches that are open to negotiation are worth exploring because meaningful links can then be made to the rich reservoirs of teachers' professional and personal knowledge and experience.

Professional learning opportunities for teachers, including participation in postgraduate study, should essentially work to empower teachers to find meaning in their professional experiences. They should enable exploration, imaginative and critical thinking as well as deep reflection. Professional learning experiences should aim to understand, represent and validate teachers' voices. When teachers' voices are valued and influential, evidence shows that students' academic performance and sense of wellbeing at school is increased (Fine, 1991). It follows then that disempowering teachers leads to the disempowerment and disengagement of students in schools.

> Disempowered teachers are unlikely to create democratic communities inside their classrooms, but are more likely to move toward silencing. Disempowered teachers are unlikely to view the "personal problems" of students (and dropouts) as their professional responsibility, but are more likely to render them outside the domain of education. And disempowered teachers are unlikely to create academic contexts of possibility and transformation, but are more likely to want to go home at 2:00 and to retire …. (Fine, 1991, p. 140).

Fine (1991) suggests that disempowered teachers lose interest and enthusiasm for their work. They look for quick and easy solutions to their problems and are less likely to design empowering learning experiences for their students. They are disconnected from the real challenges facing education and therefore model more passive, inauthentic approaches to learning in classrooms.

A Three Day Conference (as opposed to a 'permanent' one)

Let me take a moment to consider disempowerment in the context of my own professional learning. I recently attended a three day conference jointly organised by ACEL (Australian College for Educational Leadership) and ASCED (American Association for Curriculum and Educational Development) titled

'New Imagery for Schools and Schooling: Challenging, Creating and Connecting' (October, 2007). I was drawn to the language used to frame the conference theme and wondered what new metaphors for learning and teaching would be discussed there. I sat for three days in large auditoriums, isolated from colleagues listening to educational leaders expound lengthy lists of learned lessons. Hundreds of us sat in lecture theatres and large air conditioned conference rooms where the lights were dim, the colours muted and where attention was directed toward large illuminated screens. It was there, embedded in the uncluttered pages of Powerpoint, that noteworthy, numbered dot points were displayed. Like other well behaved educators around me, I obligingly documented the good advice in my exercise book before the words dissolved, scattered or faded from view. This was relatively easy to do in the short time available because lists are notoriously simple. The list, as a powerful record of uncomplicated 'truths', has become an influential text type in the discourse around schooling and reform.

Professor Viviane Robinson from the University of Aukland opened the conference with an outline of a research study that examined the link between school leadership and student outcomes. She posed the question: what works and why? She subsequently presented five dimensions of leadership that make a difference for students; the most important, she insisted was the promotion of and participation in teacher professional learning and development. She contended that teachers who engage in dialogical processes that involve them in theory making and decisive action learn more deeply about effective teaching and learning processes. And then she moved quickly to the next dimension and spoke about the importance of an Orderly Supportive Environment.

In another room the Adelaide team working on AGQTP (Australian Government Quality Teaching Project) funded professional learning programs, had constructed a Professional Development Framework which included six components: Quality Leadership; Reflective Practice; Issues for Identification; Co-learning; Inquiry Processes; and New Knowledge and New Understandings. The organizing team worked to ensure that each project encompassed each of these components and they became a useful checklist for evaluation purposes. I

admired the nervous teachers who talked seriously about their model, who had read widely and tried to disentangle from their experience some factors that seemed to make a difference. This format, this space, the expectation that technology will be used to increase efficiency, encourages list making as a form of representing knowledge at the expense of experience. I wondered what these teachers would talk about in another context, perhaps seated around a table. I wondered what they saw as they looked out at us, a group of strangers in the darkness. I reached for a mint from the white bowl before me and looked around the room. Who were these people sitting silently, listening? Some were diligently taking notes. Some gazed blankly at the slides as they changed before us on the large screen. Some were flicking through their programs planning where to go next. One woman texted quietly, nonchalantly, under the table. I imagined her writing a message to a teenage daughter somewhere, or perhaps to a colleague dealing with a catastrophe back at school. What were we learning here? What assumptions were being made about us by those who were presenting, by those who organised this conference?

On the second day Brian Caldwell in his keynote speech titled 'The Most Significant Leadership Challenges in Modern Times' introduced his Eight Challenges: what we must do in order to create real transformation in schools. Caldwell insisted we must trust the profession; allow intelligent autonomy; rebuild schools; align our key areas of capital and build social, intellectual, financial and spiritual strength; ensure real governance; support educational leaders; move beyond a silo approach and place students at the centre; and finally, see the centre as a servant. John Hattie spoke about his metastudy of over 50,000 research studies that examined the influences on students' achievement at school. He introduced his ranked list of 100 factors and spoke about the need to devote more time to the top ten factors that are clearly more influential. Michael Fullan spoke about Seven Secrets of Success and Andy Hargreaves spoke about Seven Principles of Sustaining Leadership.

All sorts of interesting contradictions surrounded the language used in the conference theme. Through the title of the conference, organisers had directed us toward the notions of Challenge, Creativity and Connectedness. In the title itself,

these concepts were diminished in their value and reduced to the form of a list, neat in its use of alliteration. The concepts were never seriously examined in the presentations I attended. What became apparent to me, as I sat immobilized and isolated between the walls of another air conditioned conference room, was that the 'new imagery for schooling' really being presented, emerged from the clear focus on list making. Lists are disentangled, minimal, easy to digest 'things to do'. Lists are calculated and must be neither too long nor too short. The purpose of the list is to organize, to clarify, and to tie up neatly. Lists can deaden creativity and prevent us from focusing on interconnections and inconsistencies. Lists are all too often decontextualised and dehumanized. They clean up our messy worlds (Law, 2003) and make the complicated knowable. In order to make a list, the list maker must bundle and prioritise disparate ideas and practices until they reach something that is orderly, clearly articulated and able to be managed. List making is a boiling down rather than an opening out. The naming and numbering of proposed items is also a factor to be considered. Language is manipulated in clever ways to create something memorable and authoritative; phrases that resemble advertising slogans. Fullan, a master at devising cleverly framed lists, included in his Six Secrets of Success: 'Bullying Backfires', 'Transparency Rules' and 'Connect Peers with Purpose'. His intentional use of poetic conventions and witty, cultural puns intend to be both entertaining as well as purposeful. The authoritative voices of list makers dominated the conference and the lists were evidence of their intellect. The speakers were framed as experts, like medical practitioners preparing lists of medicinal cures for annoying ailments; who through the very act of constructing lists, were defining priorities for whole communities. The audience at this conference sat quietly disempowered by the list makers who suggested we could only find out more by reading their recently published books.

Wedged into my conference chair in row G, I felt like a patient in a crowded doctor's surgery awaiting diagnosis. I became suddenly sick of transcribing and let my pen roll gently from my palm to the floor. I nestled down further into my comfortable chair knowing that I was really only one amongst thousands of cardboard faces. I felt secure in my anonymity and wondered how many shopping hours were left in the day. I felt myself becoming sleepy, my eyelids

lazy from too much artificial light and too much telling; and there under the watchful eye of experts, I fell asleep.

Another list maker: identifying the nature of empowered learning

Professional learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders, including higher educators, must work to empower and enliven teachers as thinkers and activators in their relational work with others. Spady (2001) suggests that our future depends on us creating empowering learning systems in our schools that enable all learners to be "competent performers in a world of continuous discovery and constant change" (p. 163). According to Spady (2001) an empowered learner is:

- an open, growing *learner*, guided by an ethos of purpose and integrity
- an imaginative, undaunted *innovator*, guided by an ethos of future-focusing and risk-taking
- an honest, affirming *partner*, guided by an ethos of collegiality and team work
- a reliable, exemplary *producer*, guided by an ethos of excellence and improvement
- a caring, committed *contributor*, guided by an ethos of win-win and accountability.

(Spady, 2001, p. 168)

Professional learning experiences for teachers should model the learning designs we expect to see in classrooms. They should, therefore, to use Spady's terms, enhance teachers as learners, innovators, partners, producers and contributors. Spady (2001) is also a list maker, skilled in using highly charged language to identify key factors that promote change. As a senior partner in an international consulting company that examines change and leadership, he frames his ideas and strategies in lists and diagrams that can easily be replicated, remembered and used. In his text *Beyond counterfeit reforms: Forging an authentic future for all learners* (2001) he outlines a rationale for shifting schools from a narrow, limiting standards and performance based paradigm to a learning focused alternative. The lists of practices and qualities he advocates are based on considered views about how people learn well; however, if the remedy was as simple as identifying and advocating an itemised list of universal key concepts, then we would all be working in highly effective learning communities.

Spady (2001) suggests five key expectations that can work to influence the quality of work teachers are empowered to do. He suggests that these expectations or strategies are fostered in effective learning cultures. These are deep reflection, active exploration, personal growth, quality performance and continuous accountability (p. 120). Spady's categories are useful lenses through which I can examine this professional learning experience. I can ask, is there evidence here of deep reflection, active exploration, personal growth, quality performance and continuous accountability? While, on the one hand, questions like these may help to scrutinize experience, it cannot be assumed that there are agreed upon definitions of key concepts like 'deep reflection' and 'personal growth'. They may not also be linear and developmental in nature as is sometimes assumed. The conditions and processes that lead to deep reflection, active exploration and personal growth can also be difficult to pinpoint, track and monitor. As Law (2003) suggests examining dynamic, situated, human activity is a bit like studying moving targets (p. 4). Law (2003) uses the term "shape-shifting reality" (p. 5) to explain the nature of phenomenon that is slippery and lacks a single form that can be rigidly and rationally described. Lists are what Law (2003) might refer to as examples of "out-thereness" (p. 6); attempts at making tangible, independent, definite, common-sense realities when in actuality, what is absent and Othered (vagueness, plurality, confusion) is also present and influential. What we need are not more lists of concepts and guidelines, however well intentioned these may be. We have more than enough astute lists at our disposal. What is now required are examples of mindfulness at play; accounts of thinking and learning generating within real professional contexts that open up complexity and illustrate diverse examples of difficult processes.

Susan's story

Susan, the postgraduate student (all names in this text have been changed) and I met approximately once a month over a period of six months. Essentially we talked about three things: what she was learning about her chosen topic; how she was going about the process of learning; and how she could make her learning visible (Perkins, 2003) to others. Susan had taught in secondary schools for a

number of years before leaving teaching to live and work in Europe. When she returned to Australia she began working in the government education sector in the area of policy and teacher support. She was drawn to this work because of her interest in exploring conceptual ideas but also because of her desire to make a difference, particularly for those students who are disengaged at school. Susan was clearly motivated, well informed, had a wealth of rich experiences to draw upon, and had a strong personal desire to learn. She had recently visited an experimental Senior School in Heimdalsgades, Copenhagen called HGO as well as two other innovative Victorian schools, Lara Secondary College and Fitzroy High School and was inspired by what she saw there. Her learning had not been confined to reading and responding to literature; on the contrary Susan had a commitment to linking theory to practice. She was also keen to link her personal learning through the Masters course to her professional work. She saw that this learning would put her in a better position to "contribute in a more meaningful way." She saw the postgraduate experience as an opportunity to "connect with people who considered thinking and reading and discussing ideas as real work". Drawing upon her recent experiences and questions she had about young people and their engagement in learning at school, Susan framed a topic for her research: The impact of time and space on learning.

My involvement with Susan in this learning experience has made me consider the thinking disposition of the learner. To use Ron Ritchhart's (2002) framing of thinking dispositions, Susan is open-minded, curious, metacognitive, strategic, skeptical and keen to search for truth and understanding (p. 27). I observed these capacities at work throughout the experience. Susan is alert to possibility and positive about learning new things. Her life experiences have helped hone these capacities and she purposefully strengthens them in her attempts to be better in her work. Her deep interest in educational issues as well as world affairs enables her to make complex connections, pose difficult questions and be critical in her outlook. Her work as a project officer in the education department enables her to move freely between the broad, theoretical view of things and the close-up view of what teachers and students do daily in classrooms. I think about professional development opportunities created for teachers and wonder whether the building of these capacities is ever intentionally at the heart of the

experience. How well do we model these dispositions for one another? Does the nature of our daily work enhance intellectual character? What sorts of experiences would enhance these capacities and make them visible so that they can be better examined and understood? I can see that this experience gives Susan the opportunity to display and make use of these capacities, but I wonder whether this experience enabled those capacities to further develop. How will I ever know this?

The research experience

Boud and Miller's (1996) concept of 'animator' helps me to define the role I play as both teacher and researcher in this context. They see the role of animator to be one of "fostering learning through experience" with the animator helping to "give life to, to quicken, to vivify, to enliven, to inspire, to encourage, to activate or to put in motion" (p. 7). Boud and Miller (1996) insist that the "influence of animators is greatly dependent on the relationships which they establish with learners" (p. 15). The nature of the relationship an animator might have with a learner can be influenced by a number of factors. Assessment processes can, they suggest, impact on the kinds of learning relationships that are possible. The social, political and economic contexts, in which the animator works, can also be influential. Constraints and expectations imposed by others can work to disempower or restrict the learner and/or the animator and thus impact on the nature of the relationship and the possibilities that develop through that relationship. Emotions also have a powerful impact on the nature of the learning relationship. The animator needs to sensitively interpret the emotions of the learner, help them to feel empowered and comfortable and purposely build trust and faith.

While I had worked informally with Susan prior to this experience and had always enjoyed her company, the fact that we were entering into a formal educational experience together framed by university structures and roles, meant that we had to find a way of being together in this context. The open, flexible nature of the 'Negotiated Unit' helped us to continue to develop the relationship we had already begun which was one based on shared respect and equality. It did

not compel us to work within predetermined roles linked to notions of 'supervisor' and 'student', nor did it impose content or assessment requirements that favoured one paradigm over another. New possibilities for learning and demonstrating learning emerged through the freedom Susan had as a learner, through the ongoing exploratory dialogue we engaged in when we met, and through the opportunities for social interaction that were created.

The animator works with the learner to find what emerges through experience and to pinpoint what is significant. In this sense, the learner becomes a co-researcher and the animator a co-learner. Susan kept a journal as she moved through this experience where she reflected on her learning. She also used journal writing and mapping strategies to create personal meaning from what she was reading and experiencing. Her writing in her journal is both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). Through the journal Susan makes her thinking and learning visible to herself and others. The journal entries are both a "turning inward and watching outward" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 86). They are a record of what she finds in her reading and experience, as well as her "feelings and thoughts about the inquiry" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 88). Susan gave her journal to me after she had completed the unit so that I could better understand her experience. It was quite familiar to me; she would often use the journal as the basis for our discussions when we met. While Susan probably had me in mind as a reader as she wrote (because she used the journal to refer to aspects of her learning in our meetings), she did not construct the journal knowing that it would be used in this research process. It was at the conclusion of the unit that, inspired by the suggestions of others, I decided to formally research and write about this experience.

A couple of weeks after the unit had concluded, a university colleague (Diana) who had attended the forum Susan organised, stopped in the doorway of my office. Some time later in the interviews I conducted, Diana recounted this moment:

> Was it a day or two afterwards that I came to see you and I said, you're going to publish this stuff aren't you? I just thought it was superb and I suppose maybe I was being a little

> bit …. I don't know if arrogant is the right word … maybe I was acting out of turn … I just wanted you to know that from my perspective it was brilliant stuff and ought to be out there.

I had not considered writing about this experience; it was Diana's idea that I do so and once she had planted the seed I began to consider the possibilities and plan the research process. I did not at this stage think that by reengaging people in conversations about the experience and by writing about it and sharing that writing with others that I would be indirectly generating new thinking and learning about what had taken place.

After the conclusion of the Masters unit, I interviewed Susan. Susan brought to the interview her notes and journal entries. She also brought copies of the readings that influenced her thinking. The interview was more like a semi-structured conversation. Open questions and prompts were used to encourage Susan to tell her story, to track what happened during the experience and reflect on the learning that occurred. I also interviewed three people who attended the invitational forum that Susan facilitated at the culmination of the unit. These people were selected randomly and were available to be interviewed at the time. One person (Dennis) works closely with Susan in her workplace and the other two (Diana and Anita), who work within the university, do not know her well. These interviews were also semi-structured conversations and each person was interviewed separately. The interviewees were given copies of material they received at the forum to prompt their memories and they were given opportunities through open questioning to direct the conversation into areas they found interesting. All interviewees are experienced educators: one has completed a PhD; one, at the time of interview was in the process of completing a Professional Doctorate; and the other, was completing a Masters degree. The process for interviewing these people was approved by the University Ethics Committee.

Like Susan, I also use writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994) to find out more about my topic, the process of writing as well my role as a researcher. Richardson (1994) suggests, "by writing in different ways, we discover new

aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable" (p. 516). In this chapter I will consider the way Susan uses writing in exploratory ways in order to develop understanding. As a writer/researcher, I aim to use writing as a method to engage in dialogue, to examine the nature of dialogue and consider the concept of voice. I am interested in Bakhtin's (1981) conception of knowledge as dialogical. For Bakhtin, language is a socially-constructed sign system. Most human activity is therefore dialogical in nature. We conduct dialogues with the world around us; with people we interact with; and in our own minds with ourselves in order to develop meaning. An utterance, according to Bakhtin (1981) can be spoken or written and requires an audience to talk to or write for. The voice will alter depending on the nature of the audience. According to Bakhtin (1981), "every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (p. 280). Bakhtin (1981) suggests that every discourse is oriented toward a "responsive" understanding.

> To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other (p. 282).

If we are to examine how understanding develops, then we must focus on both the speaker and the listener/responder. As Bakhtin (1981) suggests, the listener/responder can be oneself as well as another. We can engage in internal as well as external dialogue in order to develop meaning. As I write I engage in a complicated process of capturing my own internal dialogue as I connect with what I am reading, my personal experience, my beliefs and ideas, my imagination. I also engage in an imagined and actual dialogue with my supervisor, other colleagues and those who I feel represent potential readers. The power of this complex dialogic process, this confronting of "multiple routes, roads and paths" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 278) is very real for me as I write. It fuels the creative process as well as inspires analytical and critical thinking. It fosters deep reflection and trial and error. It is not only a crucial aspect of the writing process, it is also central in the professional learning experiences I aim to capture and examine.

They too have a dialogic orientation that penetrates the very substance of the experience. My challenge as a researcher/writer is to capture the nature of this interaction in the writing itself because then I can *show* as well as *tell* the reader how interactive dialogue is fundamental to learning.

This chapter is a hybrid textual form created by including different voices engaging in dialogue. My writing so far combines both an 'outward' perspective with a turning 'inward' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 86). While I continue to draw attention to myself by providing a personal view of doing research, I also draw upon a more authoritative, professional voice that locates my work in the context of other studies and research approaches. At times I am unsettled by the dissonance between the story teller's voice which can be more intimate and playful and the authoritative, distant, researcher voice that I find I need to engage in order to inform, explain, acknowledge, compare, analyse and persuade. I am aware that there are certain aspects of the research process that must be clear and unambiguous in order to be understood. Some things must be named and listed. A more rational, rhetorical, 'outward' voice forces me to narrow down and capture the essence of something. It forces me to take a path, track my journey and articulate explicitly my destination. While the more authoritative voice is also a dialogue between the person and the cultural and historical context within which research takes place, it seems to read more like a monologue, a one-directional telling rather than an opening up of possibilities. This voice is present in my work but if it were the only voice or the most dominant one, the meanings created through the writing process would be less interesting and one dimensional.

So far in this text I have also created moments where I 'turn inward' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 86), where I include my reflective and imaginative thoughts as well as recall personal memories in order to see something new there (these parts are written in italics). These voices highlight my personal subjectivities, uncertainties, passions and frailties. They are also opportunities for humour. They allow me to make connections to my experiences and to see meaning in the way things relate. I feel more human when I write in this way; more myself. These are examples of internal dialogue that are perhaps more like talk where ideas and thoughts unfold through the telling.

Given that Susan's learning is enhanced through multiple opportunities to engage in dialogue, I intend, in the writing of this text, to highlight the complexity of dialogic interactions and how meaning is enhanced through them. Even though I interviewed the participants separately, I have decided to create, as a product of this research, a 'conference of voices' with the participants talking to each other and to themselves. I use the actual words of the interviewees who were after all engaging in a responsive encounter with me; but I create a new context, a new landscape for the dialogue to take place in. I shift fragments of the actual dialogue into a different sequence and purposely place fragments alongside other fragments so that through juxtaposition, interesting connections are highlighted. My intention is to actively interpret the dialogue (which is what all researchers who conduct interviews do) but to also respect the views of the interviewees and seek their feedback. The interviewees were asked to read this text and offer their suggestions for changes or modifications in order to enhance validity. My intention as I write is to ensure that the interviewees recognise themselves (Raider-Roth, 2005) and hear the power of their own voices. I intend for the voices of the interviewees to be dominant in the text and not to only privilege my own. As Freebody (2003) suggests, this is often not the case in educational research. "In much educational research, we still find results from interview studies reported without any of the direct speech of the interviewees, or without any reporting of the actual talk that went on between interviewers and interviewees. Sometimes we see apparent monologues, excerpted from dialogues or multi-dialogues, even though the most obvious thing we can say about interviews is that they are conducted through interaction" (p. 138). In representing a conference of voices, *a collective story*, I aim to show how dialogue is "mutually accomplished" (Freebody, 2003, p. 125) and draw attention to how the relational possibilities and connections that develop through dialogue are at the heart of meaning-full professional learning experiences for teachers.

The dialogue that follows illustrates a three dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participants in the dialogue look backward and forward in time, recollecting memories, stating personal views and constructing a sense of identity for themselves in the future (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000, p. 55). In constructing the narrative inquiry as a researcher/writer, I play with this notion of moving backward and forward by intentionally avoiding a non-linear progression in the story. By focusing on the 'directions' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49) we travel in through dialogue, we can not only track learning that has occurred, but see thinking and learning happening through thought processes and interaction. By enabling the story to unfold and by capturing the forward/backward movement in the conversation, I intend for the reader to actively draw threads together and develop their own interpretations. As researcher/interviewer, I am aware that I purposely set directions in the conversation by posing questions, going back to previous comments, getting things back on track and I draw attention to this in the collective story. In a conversation that is meaning-full, there is constant ebb and flow between what is consciously directed and what is surprisingly thrown in.

As well as temporal issues, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest the three dimensional narrative inquiry space also involves looking inward and outward. By *inward* Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mean "the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (p. 50). *Outward* reactions are influenced more by the contextual environment and its conditions. When I read back over the interview transcripts, I noticed that there were times when the interviewees' voices seemed to be more inwardly orientated. These were moments of thinking aloud and when through the conversation unexpected connections were made and emotions expressed. I include these parts of the conversation as *inward* dialogue with the self which draws attention to the importance of internal dialogue and how the internal connects with the external voice in interesting ways. The inward voices also include thoughts that were made to me in our private conversations, but which may not have been made if the whole group were really together engaging in a conversation. A more *outwardly* oriented voice was also present in the transcripts; perhaps shaped more obviously by the presence of an audience. This is often an explaining voice, a voice focused on establishing order, sequence and clarity.

I also include my own inward and outward dialogue, my writer's voice and my researcher's voice. The researcher's voice which is more outwardly oriented

serves to consciously frame and direct the conversation and I draw attention to this by including some of the questions I posed in the actual context of the interviews. The writer's voice, the internal dialogue that is created through the process of composing a text, is also included. By making a distinction between these 'voices', I draw attention to notions of time and place. My researcher's voice is situated more publicly in the context of the interview located in the Science Room. My writer's voice is situated some time later and constructed in the private world of my study as I face the computer and draw multiple threads together.

The dialogue as it develops also draws attention to a number of pertinent places which is the third narrative inquiry space referred to by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Contextual places and spaces and their importance are evoked through the narratives. School buildings, a hospital room, Susan's journal, the institutional spaces where the interviews take place, are active agents in making meaning and can not be discounted. These places situate our narrative both literally and figuratively. I conducted the actual interviews in three different spaces: two interviews were conducted in the Science Room located in the university; one interview took place in the meeting room at the Regional Office of the Department for Education and Training; and the final interview took place in the personal office of one of the interviewees. I decided to locate the fabricated *collective story* in The Science Room for two reasons. This was an actual location so my descriptions of the space are based on a real place where discussions took place. Secondly, the metaphorical meanings more traditionally associated with the science laboratory interact with my own imaginative explorations in playful ways. We examine the rhizome as both biologists dissecting a life form and artists philosophizing about ideas. On the day I interviewed Susan, a storm brewed and heavy rain fell outside. I was aware of how protected we were in the dimly lit Science Room, how removed we were from the real elements. I chose to draw attention to these weather conditions in the fabricated collective story because I was so aware of the rain and the light on the day of Susan's interview. It surrounded the meanings we made on that day and provided an atmosphere that penetrated this experience and helped to define it. By constructing a text that draws attention to the storied nature of our thinking

and learning, I avoid the convention of analysing fragments of decontextualised dialogue and creating a cohesive, linear text. Instead I let the dialogue do the talking.

Why not tell the story straight. I could do that – start at the beginning, in the meeting room at the regional office, our first formal meeting. Is that the beginning though? Not for Susan and not even for me. Explain your theoretical position. Identify the issues. Describe the context. Introduce the people involved. Outline the research process. Claim your trustworthiness. Articulate your findings. Make a list. Draw in snippets of conversation at pertinent moments. This bit, not that bit. Start here; finish there. But it's not authentic. The story is a twisted one that branches out in multiple directions. A crooked story. Then tell a crooked story. But how? Find a way. Is that your research voice hiding there, trembling?

Learning as a living system

Two rectangular tables are pushed together in the Science Room to make a large square. The space is usually artificially lit so that budding Science teachers can conduct experiments, make close observations, and record small discoveries. Today, the room is dimly lit with natural light. Outside it is raining. We are on the third floor of the Education Building at the University. Through a bank of windows along one wall clouds and fog hover heavily, like a thick woollen blanket. On shelves around the room are positioned pieces of equipment ready to aid analysis and testing: test tubes, thermometers, electrochemical equipment, microscopes, cell culture incubators. In the centre of the table is the rhizome Susan has just pulled out of a plastic bag. It lies on a sheet of white paper dirty, limp and lifeless. Earlier that morning Susan had wrenched it from the earth, not capturing all its offshoots, but lifting out enough to show us its expansive, matted nature. There is no centre in the plant unlike a tree. It is non-hierarchical; it spreads outward, downward and sends shoots to the surface. There is no planned pathway, a "rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 7). We use our observation skills to examine the plant closely, but what

we see before us are not only thread-like root systems; what we see are possibilities.

Me (outward voice): Susan's forum was the last time we were all together. I've invited you here to talk about that experience and what led up to it as well as what's happened since that day. Let's start by introducing ourselves and explaining the connections that exist between us. Perhaps Susan, you might also want to explain some background details that led you to doing this course and taking on this particular topic.

Susan (outward voice): You all know that the forum was initiated as part of my involvement in the Master of Education course here at the university. The final unit I completed was called 'Negotiated Study'. I wanted to investigate the impact of time and place on students' learning. Rather than write an essay which I'd done in the other units in the course, I negotiated with Amanda to facilitate a forum where I would invite local educators who might also be interested in examining the concepts of time and space and how they influence what happens in schools. I had wanted to do some further study for some time. It was nothing to do with the qualification; it was more to do with engaging in some structured study in the context of the university. There are benefits for my work as well. It was interesting to me I suppose because increasingly in my work there is more stress on evidence-based development and professional development related to an evidence-base. I think that I felt that if I could undertake the Masters program then I'd be in a better position to contribute in a more meaningful way – I'd have views on how to use evidence and what constituted as evidence. My feeling is that sometimes the data-driven approach taken in education at the moment is a bit of a mixed bag. It's not really understood. Lots and lots of statistics and I think that I felt that if I could undertake my Masters I would have a deeper knowledge about research, and the other thing was the writing. I wanted to do some extended writing and thinking. I also expected to meet interesting people. I felt that the people I'd be meeting would be similarly driven, so I always thought the learning would be a shared experience. I liked the idea of the 'Negotiated Unit' because it didn't have any boundaries.

I've had an interest in student engagement at school, particularly in young people who leave school early, for some time. In conversations with young people I noticed that issues related to time and space came up frequently. It was the way time and space were constructed in schools that limited possibilities for young people. I wanted to explore these ideas more. There was another little light that went on when I started considering time and space as a topic. I remembered a paper I had read back in 2001. I actually photocopied it at the time. It was about a group of Victorian educators who had visited an experimental school in Denmark – the school was called HGO. I thought, wouldn't it be a fantastic thing to look at that particular school and so I emailed the principal there. I didn't think that this would be research in the same way that I had conducted research for the other units, you know reading books and journal articles from the library, but I remembered really wanting to visit that school when I read the article and here was a good opportunity. I had a really strong feeling that I wanted to see it, that's why that memory stayed with me. The Masters program gave me the opportunity; it gave me a reason for going and I felt confident that the principal would be willing for me to visit. I went there in January and was amazed by what I saw. It was a very flexible learning environment where teachers were responsive to the needs of their students. I took lots of photos and had opportunities to talk to students as well as teachers. I was there for 5 days. When I got home I talked to a lot of people about going to Denmark and then someone said, have you heard about Lara Secondary College and do you know what's happening down at Fitzroy High School. I visited Fitzroy High School with Dennis and Amanda. I think Dennis set it up.

Anita (inward voice): I remember a conversation with Mary. We talked about whether you can really get inside a school with just snapshots – like in just one day. I get annoyed by people making great claims without really living something. Mary had some contact with Lara Secondary College. Maybe she had a Masters student who worked there. I remember her saying: I wonder if that is how it really was. When I went to Lara myself just recently, I was looking at it in a different way, just wondering whether it was the way Susan had spoken about it. I knew about that school – the school that I worked at nearby is possibly going to close because it's taken the numbers.

Dennis (outward voice): Susan and I work together. I remember when Susan went to Lara and came back and shared the material, we had quite a long discussion about what was happening there. I'd known about Fitzroy High School and mentioned Fitzroy as a possibility for a visit. Our conversations have probably gone on for years around issues to do with teaching and learning. There's always been an exchange of interesting papers and ideas. We're both interested in what the research is saying. Our conversations are quite focused on theories and models and how they might be applied. It starts from that perspective rather than what's happening in classrooms. Our conversations didn't follow any set structure but they are always related to research and the issues in schools. They were definitely not linear, very definitely our talk is around connections.

Me (inward voice): I remember the day we visited Fitzroy High School. We attended a seminar run by teachers in the school who explained their unique timetable structure, the theme based approach to curriculum, the team structure and their focus on personalized learning. I remember sitting in the classroom and looking at Tim, the school principal sitting relaxed in the back row, listening. I liked that. I knew enough about his background to be intrigued. I decided then that I'd invite him to a forum I was organising on school leadership where invited principals would talk about what made them the sort of school leaders they are. I think I planned the whole event as I sat there. On the way home in the car Susan, Dennis and I talked about school leadership and student learning. We talked excitedly looking at the dry landscape as we travelled.

Susan (outward voice): It's interesting that Dennis says our conversations in the office are non-linear. Working within this unit was definitely not a linear process for me. It went in all sorts of different directions. And it was all consuming. I did wake up thinking about it and wondering where my ideas were going to lead. It was totally consuming and extremely interesting for me. And of course other people were involved too because I talked about it a lot. I'm someone who likes structure; I always like some structure in what I do so I was pleased to set up a regular meeting schedule with Amanda. I put my readings in a folder because I

needed to find them really quickly. I didn't think to categorise them until later. I also set up a journal. In another unit I set up a journal but I didn't get very far with it. With that unit I went straight into the reading and really getting a structure for the essay. That was a different experience. I didn't explore because the essay was going to be the end product. There was a word restriction and you had to be sensible about what you were doing. The ideas for the structure of the essay came up straight away so you were putting yourself into a fairly structured framework right from the beginning, so what you're looking for in your reading is to support the structure you've got, whereas in this, and I must say that at one stage I started thinking, doing drawings, making links between different ideas like 'power', which when you think about time and space, doesn't immediately seem relevant. I don't think I would have been thinking about power if I was writing an essay. I was really thinking about how I was learning. I don't think I've ever written about how I learn before. It wasn't an academic thing out there not related to me. I felt very involved in this experience. This is what I wrote in my journal:

> *I'm trying to observe how I'm learning in this Masters Unit. I find I read and then I take time off to think. This process of thinking may go on for longer than I feel comfortable about. I experience a sense of mild panic from time to time. I should be further along the track rather than being lucid about my ideas on the topic. The process is definitely not linear. I'm not devoting a standard slab of time each time, each day or each week to it. I'm talking to people about what I'm reading and thinking and this is helpful. The learning takes place at home, at work and the university library, while I'm driving; sometimes when I wake up, it's there. It can't be controlled by me or someone else.*

Me (inward voice): Susan is drawn for the first time to keep a journal so that she can 'observe' her learning. She has been asked to keep a journal on other occasions, but this hasn't worked for her. It works on this occasion because the learning is fascinating. I'm reading a text by Paul Atkinson (1990) and he writes in his introduction: "Social scientists are not much given to thinking about writing" (p. 1). Journal writing is the writing we do in order to capture our

thoughts, experiences and observations; the writing that documents in a strange way what we are fascinated by and drawn to. I try to include that sort of writing in this doctorate. This part of the text is journal-like in its construction as I capture fleeting thoughts, memories and hard bits that I become bogged down in. The writing here, is also contrived, reconceptualised, shaped and reshaped. An 'artful product' as Atkinson would say (1990, p. 2). I think about a meeting I was in last week. I was invited to be part of a small research team that would examine young peoples' attitudes to the world of work. I was clearly the least experienced in the group. I didn't have a clear sense of how we would work together which sometimes comes from working on many research projects over time. The conversation during this, our second meeting, centred on personal theories about what young people say (based on what the researchers had heard young people say before); prior research completed by people in the group and how this project would fit neatly amongst others; and heated debates about statistical evidence published elsewhere. I asked the group, *how will we write*? For me it was a fundamental question. For at least one of the other researchers, it was bordering on ridiculous.

"Well", she said, "we'll list all our surnames in alphabetical order."

It took me a moment to realise that I had been misinterpreted.

"No", I said, "I don't care about the order of our names. I'm interested in the writing process and how we will write together."

She looked at me quizzically. This was clearly a distraction from the main game.

"I know a few journals who would be interested in the work. Let's not bother about where we'll publish this yet."

Okay, I thought to myself, I need to find a way to get out of this project now.

After the meeting I went back to my office and this is what I wrote in my journal:

> *Let me observe what's happening here. I've been framed as naïve and inexperienced. I don't have a problem with that although it makes me feel disconnected from the others. My questions about how people define terms and about how we might work and write together, are considered basic or even worse, irrelevant. When Patricia looked at me over her notebook, probably really looked at me for the first time, I could feel her thinking, "Are you serious?" I can see that for some researchers the*

process of research is not about open exploration, or about opportunities to connect with people in the real contexts of their complex lives; but it's about reconfirming findings and firmly held beliefs, it's about being pragmatic and narrowing down rather than opening out. I'm made to feel silly but strangely, I feel strengthened by that. I know now, more adamantly, what sort of research I want to do, and what sort of research I will avoid. I'm slowly finding my feet as a researcher.

Anita (outward voice): I remember hearing about what Susan was doing in this unit through Mary, one of our university colleagues. I lecture at the university and knew of Susan, but mainly through what Mary said about her. Mary worked with Susan on another unit in the Masters course and is very fond of Susan. Mary was very ill at the time of the forum and because I was visiting her in hospital, I spoke to her about what was going on at the university. Those weeks before Mary died she was living through me completely. She wanted to know everything, even right down to the stories of what my children were doing. She was interested in Susan's presentation. She asked *why was so and so there?* It was an obligation. It was just the role that had developed for me. I was consciously thinking, how will I share that with Mary? I remember carefully remembering the order of events and the activities that we did so that I could relate that to Mary. When she started asking harder questions about what did Susan really say, I had to step back for a minute and I remember realizing that she wasn't really saying anything in a really didactic sense; she was wanting us to make our own sense of the experience.

Me (inward voice): I was the last person to see Mary alive. I went to visit her at the hospital. I hadn't seen her in weeks and when I walked into the room she was lying with the white sheet up around her chin, her face so thin and gaunt. I had seen that look before on my father's face days before he died in a hospital in the same street. That look of life being drained. Her voice was graspy and soft like his and yet she did not speak of death. She spoke like she would continue to be. Did she know that she was dieing? I remember thinking, maybe she isn't. I thought that my father would bounce back too, and then suddenly it dawned on me, when I caught a glimpse of him through a door ajar, how frail he really was.

I saw him as a stranger might see him and that was when I knew. When I walked out of the ward after visiting Mary, I wept. Not really for Mary but for my father.

Anita (outward voice): It's interesting that you're talking about the demands of writing an essay or a more conventional response Susan. I love things to be different and to challenge the boundaries and academic conventions. At the same time there's always that heavy mantle of academia and it flicks through my head even though I reject it, that maybe that's not going to be as demanding as writing something. I was struggling with that in my own writing at the time and I thought I'd go along and see. Writing is much easier to contain. The forum involved a range of different levels. Some were really exciting and some were annoying. What it opened up was shared learning in a way that writing on your own just doesn't do.

Susan (inward voice): I wonder what Anita was annoyed by and whether that matters. I remember on the night of the forum I was really nervous which was funny because I was well prepared. You never know how things like this will go. It's a risk. I felt very present. I was the facilitator, I was aware of what was going on around, but I wasn't trying to be too analytical about it. I could just feel that it was working. I could feel that different groups were working in different ways. Different personalities had an impact at different tables. It just felt that people were engaging in the ideas and I felt really positive about it.

Diana (outward voice): I work with Anita at the university and I didn't know Susan at all before the forum. I went because I received an invitation. I'm not sure that if I were doing my Masters that I'd be prepared to take that sort of risk. What if it had fallen flat? What if people hadn't interacted? What if they weren't really interested? What if the room was full of dutiful people who only made polite noises? What if the material didn't engage? What if? What if? She didn't know when she sent me that thing what I was like. Really. She didn't know that at all. Everybody who reads a thesis knows exactly what they're going to do. One arrived in the mail this morning. There's the form I fill in and I will write a report. I know what to expect and I know I'll probably have a really good time marking it because I enjoy this stuff, but it's also going to be tedious as I

wade through the material and the conventional stuff that's put out there; the methodology chapter, all of that sort of thing. I found Susan's work stimulating, exciting. I wanted to be involved. I wanted to interact with other people. But I thought she took a hell of risk in doing that.

Me (outward voice): I was wondering whether we could go back to your thinking and learning as you were working toward the forum Susan. What are your earliest memories?

Susan (outward voice): One of the things I suppose I remember clearly in the beginning was your enthusiasm for the topic and also clarifying the fact if I were to run a forum, then that would be the assessment. That was quite an interesting part of the process because it was interesting for me to know that at least at this university, with you as my supervisor, there was the flexibility to do things in a different way and that was quite exciting. Because I was looking at the use of time and space and its relationship to learning, if I could create a forum that embodied some of the principles, then the participants could actively create some knowledge that would stay with them beyond the forum. I felt sure that if people actively engaged in the thinking, if teachers could be encouraged to think about what was happening for young people, then they might consider trying to do things a bit differently. Here in my journal (*Susan opens the journal sitting on the table before her*), I've written ***New Language Needed*** in bold blue texta and there's a quote from the author of 'The Little Prince':

> To grasp the meaning of the world today we use a language created to express the world of yesterday. The life of the past seems nearer to our true natures, but only for the reason it is nearer our language (de Saint Exupery, 1939, p. 43).

I think that's so true. Everyone has been to school so they think they know what it is. I wrote down some ideas near that quote: school, subjects, school term, teacher, student, knowledge, learning – people know these things and it's because they're imbued with so much meaning from the world of yesterday. In the forum I needed to model the ideas being grappled with. I needed to use the space in different ways. I had to have multiple modalities of learning. I needed good,

stimulating, controversial questions to attract and engage participants, to get them thinking beyond what they know.

Susan (inward voice): When I flick through my journal I see evidence of my thinking. I was trying to look at different ways of representing the information and my thoughts, hoping that this would give me a key about how to present my learning publicly. I've got a mind map here looking at schools as living systems. Then I looked at time and space and the relationship to learning in two ways: under pedagogy of transmission and pedagogy of transformation, so I did a chart to look at how it was different. I constructed a wheel on poster paper which gave me a way of looking behind the question – so I'm thinking about space and time and learning in secondary schools, but really what am I concerned about? I keep coming back to my real concern: there are too many young people who don't feel they're any good at school and say school is not good for them. (*Susan unrolls the chart on poster paper that she has constructed*)

Susan (outward voice): I think it was around that time that I looked up a site on critical thinking. I was thinking about what to do with the forum and I was trying to look for some questions that might help me to explore and decide how the forum could be conducted. I came across this critical thinking website and it led me to a French site and because I speak French, I had a look at that. The French are really into clear, logical thinking so I found this wheel and it was about 'thinking about thinking' and so the headings in the wheel were really appropriate for me to try and analyse space, time and movement in schools. It really made me identify my principal concerns, the question I was trying to answer, the information I needed, the principal concept behind my question, the assumptions my reasoning was based on and so on.

Me (outward voice): Looking at your chart and the mind maps you've created, I'm drawn to their beauty, the aesthetics of them. Can you talk about that?

Susan (outward voice): Yes it's important the way things look. It was a life changing experience a few years ago when Tony Buzan came here and I was lucky enough to attend a one day conference. Immediately, I started using colour

and also using mind maps for planning. I found his book in a second-hand book store not long after he was here and there are some beautiful mind maps in that. To me there's no doubt that mind maps when they're done with colour and with diagrams, definitely mirror the way we think much better than writing in the same colour in text just down the page. There is an aesthetic sense to the way things are presented because it stays in my memory.

Dennis (outward voice): At the forum you had visual images of the schools displayed. They were quite important. I remember them vividly. The whole notion of how space is organised and what it looks like was obviously central so the visual images were powerful reminders of how things could be different.

Susan (inward voice): I'm reminded of one early journal article I read that was really interesting and had an impact on my ideas, although it was quite hard to read because it was talking about 'actor networks' a thing I hadn't really come across before.

Me (inward voice): The article Susan refers to (McGregor, 2004) examines the relationships between the artefacts that exist in the material world of schools and those who work within those spaces. McGregor (2004) suggests that pedagogy is the product of a network rather than an individual: a dynamic network of effects created through the interaction between teachers, students and objects. McGregor (2004) writes: "Objects and technologies are not simply passive presences or mechanistic manipulators, as is sometimes suggested in relation to computers, for example, but mediate *between* humans. They may also be active components of such relations" (p. 349). In other words, objects have agency too. According to McGregor (2004) Actor Network Theory suggests 'actors' may be artefacts, creatures, structures, technologies, principles and processes that come together in an active relationship (p. 353). Certain configurations of networks work together to produce powerful effects. Actor Network Theory, suggests McGregor (2004), examines "how organizations 'keep themselves in place.' Organisations do this by focusing on interactions that succeed in stabilizing or reproducing themselves through the juxtaposition of materials (human and non-human) and strategies…" (p. 353). This article inspires me to consider the inconspicuous, but highly active

components that work to influence teachers' professional learning: the conference space attired with comfortable chairs in lines; the use of Powerpoint and Excel Spreadsheets as tools to capture and transmit key ideas and research findings; the workshop activity framed around a prescribed question or task; the focus on experts delivering pre-prepared messages; the sense of urgency present in selected voices; the passivity of seated bodies; pen and paper on tables for note-taking. Learning opportunities for teachers that simply reinforce stable, persistent networks of interaction and knowing will no doubt lead to more of the same.

Susan: (outward voice): One of my strongest visual memories is of people walking around in the Circle Time at the very beginning of the Forum and the Silent Statements. I had framed some belief statements around learning and teaching and people silently got out of their seats if they agreed with the statement and changed seats with another person who also agreed. I was trying to focus the attention on our personal beliefs and values and for people to see how their values were connected with others'. It was also a way of people getting to know one another but in a meaningful and relevant way.

Diana (outward voice): Interactions like these involve taking a risk. Every time you make a public statement in front of your peers, you've got that thing of someone rolling their eyes at you or looking as though they've sucked a lemon and that's a thing that we have with students all the time in our tutorials. I certainly didn't feel like a knowledgeable 'Other' there. I felt like a participant in a process and this is what you managed to do Susan. It was remarkable. It was very public. Here's me. See me and what I do. Here's my knowledge. And come and play with me as opposed to 'behind closed doors.' Postgraduate pedagogy is a big field and there're a lot of people writing in it but most people are writing things like how to manage your supervision or your research journey. All of them construct the students, as far as I'm concerned, as the recipient of the conventional wisdom generated by a supervisor. That does not allow the courage; it actively works against this person shaping their own learning. And if that's the case, are they really generating their own knowledge? They're basically replicating things that have been done for ever and ever. What happens between

these consenting adults is a very private act. Well Susan's thing was a very public act and it blew that whole conventional approach out of the water.

Anita (inward voice): I remember a room full of people. I didn't know quite a few of them, some I knew quite well. The fact that everyone came from different backgrounds was really interesting because often we're in spaces with similar people who have similar interests; whereas in this we were asked to be part of something that we really didn't know very much about. I remember the quite heavy lead-in at the beginning in terms of getting you to think about your beliefs and values and that process was interesting although I must admit to feeling a bit annoyed early on and afterwards I thought about it and I thought I really shouldn't have because I spend a lot of my working life in that space thinking about those sorts of things and talking to people about those things so for me it was repetitive whereas for others it was completely new. My sense was that it was a really short space of time and I thought can't we just get this over and get to the stuff that is really interesting? And the metaphor thing at the beginning was interesting but it didn't work for me. I found that frustrating and that's good to think about. The thing I love about this project is the layers upon layers and the reflection within reflection. I mean I was thinking: why doesn't that work for me? The bit about physically showing your beliefs was interesting and I thought from a teaching point of view, yes I like that idea, but I wasn't exactly sure where it fitted in the whole thing. Then again, knowing Susan, it was probably a positioning activity and I'm always interested to see how other teachers present things. So it wasn't just go in and do as I'm asked, there was that sense of, what's this doing to me? How am I responding to it?

Dennis (outward voice): The Circle Time activity at the start wasn't confronting or challenging for me, although there was a slight element of let's get on with the real business. However, it's interesting if you view learning being about social collaboration, then establishing and building those sorts of connections are really important so once again it was probably a deliberate attempt to be true to the ideas that underpin the work. When you try to do that stuff with principals, there's sometimes a really negative reaction. They possibly see it as game playing and not the sorts of games that principals like to play. The critical thing

is that it does take time so there's a view that let's skip the formalities and get straight down to business, rather than engaging in social interaction as the basis. The Circle Time and the planets activity were outside what you might expect if you were expecting a formal presentation.

Susan (inward voice): It was Dewey who said, 'Through living we learn'. That makes sense to me. I remember coming across this idea that we are made up of holograms of the systems we live in and therefore it's important that we develop understanding of ourselves. Through ourselves we can understand the systems we live in.

Susan (outward voice): I was looking for something that would hold the forum together and that would encourage people to think about the key elements of schooling that give it gravitational energy. What does the system revolve around? What are our central concerns? That's where the planet idea came from. I came across this idea from *Think like a genius* (Siler, 1996) about shifting your solar system. So thinking back to Ptolemy, the view of the universe where the Earth was at the centre, I asked people to think about what was driving education. We then talked about the Copernican view where the sun was at the centre which not only reshaped the cosmic order but challenged our sense of self importance. If we were going to have a transformation in learning, how would it look? That was quite a pivotal time for me when I came across that because all of sudden I had something that people could apply their thinking to.

Dennis (outward voice): I'm reminded of one of the papers Susan gave me about Hewlett Packard and the way that innovation took place within the organization. It's an interesting story. They did an analysis of where the innovation was coming from and it ended up that new ideas for improving the organization were coming from a group of women who work at Hewlett Packard. What they had in common was they were all quilters and they met socially as well as being work colleagues. Effectively, the key element in the generation of innovation was the social interaction that took place between this group of women rather than any sort of planned organizational structure. It you think about it, so many of the things that seem really important happen rather than are

planned. Something will stimulate a thought that leads to something else. Central to it, there also has to be that notion of intentionality. If it's a network without any real purpose, then it's not going to lead people to innovate or to create knowledge. There has to be a sense that we're doing this and at the end we really want to grow something.

Me (inward voice): I need to steer this discussion toward the poor rhizome lying limply on the table before us. Away from its earthy home environment, it looks so helpless and unimpressive. And yet its power to represent as well as transform our thinking has been immense. It was Susan who stumbled across the metaphor in her reading. She used it as a metaphor to depict a view of learning; an alternative view to more hierarchical, linear and mechanical models. When she spoke to me about the metaphor in one of our meetings, I made immediate connections to my own learning and the research projects I was engaged in for this doctorate. She used the rhizome in the forum in a symbolic way and she had examples of rhizomes there on the table for us to inspect and touch. At the conclusion of the unit, when Susan and I discussed the learning that had occurred, we both realised that the rhizome was an appropriate metaphor for thinking about this experience. It enabled us to think about and describe learning and thinking that is thriving. We saw the power of unexpected connections, persistent burrowing, and multiple routes. It also enabled us to see, through its horizontal structure, the potential of non-hierarchical approaches that avoid notions of higher and lower, better and worse. It gives me the confidence to act with agency and to disrupt more conventional, hierarchical models that are embedded in the academic world. Working with Susan in this unit has been a powerful learning experience for me because of the continuing interconnections it has fostered.

Me (outward voice): Thinking about 'growing something', let's turn our attention to the rhizome.

Susan (outward voice): I had been keeping my eye out for metaphors. Early on in the year, because I was always talking to people about what I was doing, one of my colleagues told me about someone from Deakin University and how she'd just read this really exciting thing about how our Western thought and knowledge

is aborescent thinking and that really thinking is more like a rhizome. She just happened to mention that and I rather liked the idea because I've thought about knowledge before as a tree and so that conversation just stuck in my mind. I put the word 'rhizome' into a search engine and the first thing I got was 'What is a rhizome? I'm so glad you asked.' It turned out it was a website on rhizomes and that led from one thing to another. I then learned about Deleuze and Guattari and I thought this is what it's all about. I thought we're contained because of this idea of knowledge, particularly in schools – the Maths, the Sciences, the hierarchical relationship between subjects. For many years I've questioned the British valuing of certain occupations. You know, we think that doctors and lawyers are more valuable, that their knowledge is more important, in terms of the money but also in terms of kudos. I liked the idea of the rhizome because it also connected to the mind mapping movement, that things went out from a central idea but that they could connect around in other ways. I have to say that I was excited about it. I remember that when we talked about the rhizome as an alternative and transformative metaphor for learning and I gave each group a rhizome to examine, it was very tactile. There were a few people where that was quite significant – to actually be able to touch it and see how it was connected and think about it at the same time.

Dennis: (inward voice): Thinking is partly talking to ourselves. In my head I am making connections to my reading around network learning: the idea that networks and social collaboration are the basis for the development of knowledge. Knowledge is generated out of multiple connections and interactions and things that happen across groups of people. They have to have some sort of shared tension too and a sense of direction. It's more a product of the relationships than it is some sort of knowledge embodied outside of people. Essentially you need to be comfortable with uncertainty and the unfinishedness of things. That's the problem in our schools. They think that it's largely about information distribution rather than encouraging people to generate knowledge. Social processes are necessary for that. Unless it connects with other people it remains sterile knowledge. That notion of fertile ground is also really important – that desire to find out more, to explore, to research. It leads thinking forward but it

also creates the conditions for learning. If you live in a state of contentment, why would you want to change anything?

Anita (outward voice): The researcher from Deakin was Eileen Honan. I'd been to her presentation where she used the rhizome as a metaphor to describe her experiences in Papua New Guinea. It was sort of a tropical image and the rhizome was really colourful – I remember an image she had on a slide. But I don't think some people went on the journey with her of connecting to that image. See, I can see the picture, but I can't actually remember what she talked about.

Anita (inward voice): I remember thinking that I'm not sure that the rhizome works so well in this situation either. Bringing the physical plant was really interesting because I wondered whether after Eileen's presentation, that people didn't understand because they didn't know what rhizomes were. Even though she described them, if you weren't a gardener, you wouldn't have a sense. Whereas I have a really clear sense of what they are in my garden. And how they grow. That meant that it was something useful. But I don't know that the connection was made to the actual space and pedagogy thing as clearly. I think that Susan's intention was for us to make our own sense of it, but I had a feeling that there was this: What does this mean? How does this work? That wasn't the strongest part of the conversation for me, but from a teacherly point of view, I could see why it was done. Maybe because I'd heard about it before, it was put into the mix of what I know a bit about.

Anita (outward voice): It's interesting because the metaphor was fore-grounded in my thinking afterwards because it connected to some of the work I was writing about in my doctorate where I was writing about the interconnections of emotion, reflection and intuition. There were some interesting connections for me but they were just conversations in my head.

Diana (outward voice): I didn't know Susan but I'd been interested in that whole notion of the rhizome as a metaphor because my own research is very much a post structuralist way of looking at things and I saw what Susan was doing as an extension of that. I'd been to Eileen Honan's workshop too and I

think she did a wonderful presentation: it's that whole notion of discourses being connected with other discourses being connected with other discourses, interacting with other discourses, appropriating discourses, changing discourses and all of those things really creating subject positions that we adopt or don't adopt. The rhizome one is a much nicer metaphor than the tapestry one that I use. I tend to look at the tapestry and the interweaving of things. It looks very smooth at the front but when you turn the tapestry over, it's really quite messy. The rhizome has that thing of popping up where you don't expect it to pop up so it's probably a better metaphor for the way I approach my work.

Anita (inward voice): When I think about it, the emotional overlay was really interesting. Susan's forum was about a week before Mary died and at that time I was also writing about care in research and building up my own concept of careful research as being full of care, being careful of peoples' responses to you as a researcher. You know, using their voices carefully, honoring their words. Mary and I spoke about how when you're feeling pressured, you're less focused on the other. Time was running out for Mary so every conversation had an edge of this hour glass slowly ticking. It really did. We both knew that we were talking about something that she would not be a part of. When I think back to the forum, it's really interesting to stand back and look at myself in that group situation. I always think that I'm quite switched on to other people and when I think about it now, I remember just the feelings.

Me (outward voice): I'm interested to know whether you have done anything as a consequence of having attended the forum. Have there been any ongoing effects? Are the roots that Susan nurtured, continuing to grow?

Dennis (outward voice): I guess coming out of that and other connections was the Doing Things Differently day where I invited a whole group of schools up to talk about how they are dealing with time and space differently.

Diana (outward voice): I've used the material in my tutorials. I already have. I acknowledged them, I always do, but I took some of that stuff with me and I used it with my students. I've passed it around to colleagues and said have a look at

this. I've said this is one way of representing the Copernican system compared with another. It's having a ripple effect. It's the rhizome actually happening. The very thing that she was talking about as informing her research, it's not a self-fulfilling prophesy, it's an illustration of how it happens.

Anita (outward voice): I remember going back to class and talking about the presentation and talking about the whole concept of time in learning and time in institutions and I got the usual people looking at me animatedly and absolutely involved and other people looking at me as though I was a total idiot. That's fine. I thought it was definitely worth taking back to the students and then we talked about space in terms of the space that we had. We talked about the spaces that they'd taught in and what impact that had on the way they felt. I'm also left with questions about you as a supervisor and Susan as a student and what that relationship was and how involved you were in that product. Because for me as a supervisor at Masters level, that's always an interesting dilemma. That whole relationship is quite tricky. Masters students tend to be older, more experienced and more certain so I've got one student whose written twice as much as she should have and when I've asked her to cut it back, she's said no because that represents her learning. The fact that you haven't started with a project that was just for you to research or that Susan didn't set out with a project that was just for her is interesting and worth thinking more about. So much of what we do is live, learn, reflect and talk about it at the time, and let go. I'm aware of this as I'm cleaning out my office at the moment, getting ready to leave. I'm getting rid of paper and thinking, these are really interesting. They represent really profound learning and here it is going into the bin. I hate that but that's what happens.

Susan (outward voice): I've come away with more questions too and I suppose the biggest one is: how can we work with schools on a bigger scale? This was taking some ideas to a small group of interested people. I definitely believe that different uses of time and space can have a profoundly positive effect on the learning of students so that a lot of the power relationships in learning are let go of. A big question for me is how can the ideas about what can happen be discussed within the current structures? I'm still really interested in how we can

prevent young people from feeling that they're no good at school. That's what it comes down to.

Teachers empowered to learn

I recently read an account written by a teacher of learning in her classroom (Schneier, 2001). She described an important realization: that she was not the best source of knowledge when it came to helping her students understand a poem they were reading in class. She writes:

> As I came to realise that I did not need to be the translator of the subject matter to the students, I had the feeling of something lifting, a physical shifting of weight from my shoulders onto the poem. I saw my own place in the work as shifting from leading the students through my sequence of ideas toward creating circumstances in which they could explore the poem directly and build their own responses, individually or collectively, their own route of access to it (Schneier, 2001, p. 192).

Schneier (2001) writes about the importance of relying on students' minds; having faith in what students bring to a new learning context as well as their potential. She writes about the depth of possibility that is evident in the classroom and her own responsibility as a teacher to "support our students' reliance on their own powers of thought" (p. 194). What is at stake, Schneier (2001) argues, through the choices teachers make, is the mind of the learner: "We are always either supporting or diminishing their reliance on their ability to think" (p. 194). Schneier's (2001) measure of success as a teacher is how well she casts students back into their own minds (p. 194).

It seems logical that teachers in their professional learning also need to be empowered to think deeply so that they understand learning and teaching and the complexity of these processes more profoundly. Spady (2001) suggests that we know when learners are empowered through learning when we see evidence of them growing and opening themselves up to new learning; taking risks and innovating; working as affirming partners with others; producing work that is excellent and leads to improvement; and contributing in caring, committed, accountable ways. Susan's participation in the negotiated postgraduate unit that

also drew in other educators was by her own admission a profound learning experience. There is clear evidence in the accounts shared by Susan and others that Susan was empowered through this experience and displayed all the qualities identified by Spady (2001). What was it about the nature of the experience that enabled these empowering qualities to develop and show themselves? In attempting to respond to this question, I will refer back to Spady's (2001) five principles and expectations that work to develop effective learning cultures and empowered learning. Susan would agree that these aspects were key components of her experience: deep reflection, active exploration, personal growth, quality performance and continuous accountability.

Through the use of various thinking strategies, ongoing exploratory conversations and her own valuing of reflection, Susan reflected deeply not only on her subject, but also on the processes of thinking and learning. She did this privately in her journal and also publicly in ongoing conversations with others. For the first time tracking and monitoring her learning and thinking within a formal educational setting has been meaningful and authentic because she is making connections between a vast array of ideas and experiences that are both personal and professional. In her journal and in conversations she made meaningful and sometimes unusual connections between personal experiences, what she was reading and what emerged in conversations. As she stretched her thoughts, retraced steps, stayed with her confusion and mapped and remapped the territory, she became the rhizome expanding outwards and down and relishing in small shoots that suddenly extended to the surface. Reflection, for Susan, is multiple voices taking up threads and leaving others behind; a thoughtful moving backwards and forwards through time and place; a pulling out of something significant and doing something with it with others. Reflection is created through dialogue that is internal and external, authoritative and intimate; it is developed through the complicated mix of being certain and not, and through an ongoing preparedness to search.

Susan actively engaged in exploration. She moved around the concepts of time and space like an animal patiently circling its prey; observing, waiting, alert. She considered possibilities. She searched for ways to make her thinking and

learning visible. She experimented with ways to share her understandings with others and draw them into the process of wondering. She was not locked into prescribed processes and rigid expectations; rather she aimed to make complex, meaningful connections between her subject and her method of presentation. Her search, as Spady (2001) suggests, is a search for better ways (p. 121). She engaged in a "stimulating search for possibilities" that lay beyond her "current awareness or existing patterns of educational practice" (p. 121). Susan engaged in a search beyond the familiar and the tried and true (Spady, 2001, p. 121) in relation to the content she examined, her methods of study and how she presented her understandings to others.

It is also evident through the course of her journey that personal growth occurs. She develops conceptual understandings of her subject that she can make use of and share with others and develops and demonstrates her capacity to engage others in thinking reflectively, creatively and critically. When one's capacities are expanded, Spady (2001) suggests there is an "intense sense of fulfilment" (p. 122). When new insights are developed, it is not only the individual who benefits. In an effective learning culture, new insights and skills are shared with others and so growth can best be understood in collegial terms. Growth is not, as Spady (2001) contends a static endpoint; it is continuously expanding (p. 122). The unpredictable, surprising, matted nature of growth is beautifully demonstrated by the rhizome. Rather than being a linear process with an upward trajectory, growth is expansive in multiple directions.

Susan is obliged to reach high standards of performance. It is clearly an expectation in postgraduate study that learners demonstrate a sophisticated level of skill and knowledge; however, the public nature of the forum and the possibility of Susan receiving multiple forms of feedback from respected colleagues increased her desire to do well and produce quality work. She needed to model the ideas she espoused and empower others to learn with her if she was to work toward achieving her overall goal of making a difference for young people in schools. Her strong sense of purpose and the authenticity of the experience fuel her desire to do the best she can. It is clear in the dialogue of the participants, however, that not everyone engages in an experience in the same

way. We have different entry points and our definitions of 'quality' are influenced by individual perspectives and personal values. Ongoing reflective and metacognitive responses that are articulated publicly and internally can work as checking mechanisms that foster further development and insight. It is clear in the participants' dialogue that even when some approaches and performances are initially questioned, they are appreciated and understood through reflection and metacognition. It is interesting that these important ways of thinking were fostered through this experience.

Finally, continuous accountability is evident. Spady (2001) suggests that accountable people are "conscious and connected" (p. 124). They are trustworthy, well organised and responsible. Susan was clearly driven by moral purpose and the public nature of the learning experience enhanced her sense of responsibility. Deadlines, meeting dates, the purpose of meetings and even the assessment criteria were negotiated. Susan was empowered to decide with her supervisor what this experience would actually look like and how it would finally be judged. She had personal ownership over the process which meant that the accountability requirements suited her. The public and collaborative nature of this experience also worked to enhance accountability. Other people who Susan respected were directly involved and open to giving Susan feedback along the way. The possibility that others might take aspects of her work and make use of it in other educational settings, further enhanced Susan's sense of purpose and responsibility.

The 'Negotiated Unit' was an open space with potential. Within this space experiences were free to emerge and develop (or not); multiple relationships could be formed (or not); a variety of interlocking ideas could be examined (or not). The 'not' is what scares us most and so we plan and manipulate in order to avoid nothing happening; in order to focus on something. In educational learning experiences for both teachers and students, the 'something' is what is valued by those empowered to decide. What is absent, suggests Law (2003) is what is purposely excluded, hidden, repressed, denied, Othered. In a more 'open' space for learning, like the one offered here, learners are empowered to decide what is and is not of value and to critically examine the choices they make. This seems to suggest that intention and purpose are the most influential factors at work.

This learning experience suggests, however, that mysterious, unpredictable, unintentional forces are also significant. Influential ideas pop up in timely moments; emotional, background circumstances influence our perceptions and sensitivities; random conversations take us further in our thoughts; unlikely connections are made between different occurrences. When the experience is rich; when multiple, paradoxical elements work together in dynamic ways that are intentional and random, certain and uncertain, then the demands are challenging. Slattery (1995), referring to the work of Briggs (1992), compares the complex, dynamic elements of weather to a postmodern vision of learning that recognises interacting elements that are more chaotic than ordered and rational. Deep learning occurs in a storm of elements colliding. Learning is meaning-full experience that relies on knowing and not knowing. Professional learning experiences must empower teachers and enable them to understand the nature of meaning-full learning so that they can foster it in their classrooms.

It is fitting that Susan's words, her thoughts about learning, conclude this chapter. After the forum and at the conclusion of the Negotiated Unit, she wrote the following in her journal:

> It's been an exciting process working through this unit with Amanda who has been prepared to let me follow the flow of my thoughts and investigations, while encouraging through suggestions – at first it seemed daunting writing your own topic, working out a way to investigate it and decide on an assessment approach and criteria – however having done this, I realise how empowering it is to be trusted and also to trust the process.
>
> A few weeks ago I thought of another long effect of my secondary education – although I was a good student and passed everything in secondary school except an October mock exam in Maths B, I was never able to understand poetry in the way the teachers did – from a young child, reading was and has always been my main interest in life. However, for over 20 years after I left school, if ever a passage of poetry was quoted in a novel, I always skipped it as I felt I wasn't capable of penetrating the meaning. One day in my early 40s, I realised what I had been doing and why and started consciously reading these excerpts – but the lingering feeling that I may not have it quite as it's meant to be, is still there.

Compared to the feelings of lack of competence which so many of our own students feel when they leave school, this is a minor matter – however it illustrates the long lasting effect of messages received at school and the barriers this puts up to a more fulfilling life.

Patrick Slattery (1995) ended an article I read with T. S. Elliott's (1971) famous quotation: "We shall not cease from exploring, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time" (p. 145).

Chapter Six
Attending to experience: finding meaning-full learning in problem situations

Context: Core Reflection Workshop with Fred Korthagen and Angelo Vasalos.

Warrenmang Winery, Australia, February, 2008.

> Contrast of lack and fullness, of struggle and achievement, of adjustment after consummated irregularity, form the drama in which action, feeling, and meaning are one. The outcome is balance and counterbalance. These are not static nor mechanical. (Dewey, 1934, p. 15)

The restaurant and balcony at Warrenmang Winery overlooks part of the vineyard. The vines at this time of year are glossy green; bunches of plump, purple grapes hang heavy and silent in the warm mid-summer sun. The vines are well behaved and content to stay in line. They are trained to curl themselves around a well placed framework; to grow in directions that make watering and picking easy. Not like us. Perhaps we are more like the untamed bushland: prickly in places, dense and lawless. From the balcony we are in awe of the dry hills dotted with ancient gums and the rocky outcrops that look over us like tender guardians. They overwhelm everything with their grace and peaceful watching. The landscape is so still, so composed, it is almost like a backdrop for a theatrical production. When we engage in conversation or become lost in an idea, we almost forget it is there. Our attention shifts to one another, to private interactions and to the sharing and sorting through of what we do in our ancient organisations. Then there are moments when we lose ourselves in individual thoughts of families left behind, of problems unresolved; quiet moments of inward contemplation. Suddenly, our eyes avert and we are overtaken again by the landscape's sheer magnitude and beauty. We have come here to engage in a professional learning experience; to a place of cunning contradictions.

A focus on reflection

We have arrived here as a group of teacher educators from two different universities, one located in a large metropolitan city and the other in a small regional town, to extend our thinking and learning about reflection. Some of us know one another professionally, but mostly we know very little about each other. We are here to attend a professional learning 'course' for teacher educators that will be facilitated by Fred Korthagen and Angelo Vasalos who work at the Institute of Education at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. The three day intensive course is the first stage of a focus on core reflection, a structured approach to reflection that according to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) enables the learner to think deeply about the interconnections between the inner layers of self and professional experience. Some of us know Korthagen's research well and have used the ALACT model, named after the first letter of the five phases, in our work with pre-service teachers. Korthagen's ALACT model is designed to promote experiential learning and reflection on experience (Korthagen, 2001, p. 16) through a structured focus on **a**ction, **l**ooking back on the action, **a**wareness of essential aspects, **c**reating alternative methods of action and **t**rialling new approaches. We know less about the new research which focuses on the concept of core reflection; an approach linked to the ALACT model but designed to provide a focus on *what* the teacher should reflect upon (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 51). Most of us do not realise that means a focus on the less rational aspects of self. A small group of the teacher educators present have developed a strong professional connection with Korthagen and their work has been influenced by his research in ongoing ways. Others come with a more critical perspective and feel that Korthagen's focus on the personal ignores important political, cultural and contextual elements. Still others do not know his work at all. We are a diverse group with varied research interests, personal life circumstances, beliefs and values, but our common interest in education and the way we define ourselves collectively as 'participants' rather than 'presenters' draws us strangely together.

When we come to a professional learning experience as a 'participant' we are not obliged to feel or take responsibility; we can, if we like, settle into a background seat and withdraw. We can move in and out of the experience as though it were a separate container, a vessel to either watch from a distance or jump aboard. Those who have designed the experience, who have laboured over the structure, who have constructed and reconstructed a complex narrative over time, feel the joy and commitment that comes through being insiders, of owning something that is named, identifiable, used and recognised. But as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, we impose boundaries in order to define, quantify and control; the metaphor of the container can work to powerfully constrain what is possible in our thinking and action for both those who design experiences and those who watch from the sidelines. As 'participants' and outsiders we quickly begin to make judgements about the nature of the professional learning activity and what it requires of us. As educators we are familiar with the usual formats: we can be expected to workshop with colleagues, listen to speakers, listen to other teachers, take notes, visit schools, read books, work through kits, use on-line information, coach a colleague, take on a project. As 'participants,' there are well established frameworks and familiar routines for us to fit snugly into as we position and reposition ourselves in our seats. It is the 'presenter' who initially takes responsibility for urging, explaining, and defining the territory. As 'participants' we wait uncertainly for an invitation to take part and to be spurred into action. We wait for a connection. From outside we can focus our critical lens and question the assumptions inherent in a new idea before thinking open-mindedly. We can 'participate' hesitantly and warily within someone else's framework until it gradually becomes our own. The level and type of participation we engage in is ultimately up to us. If we like we can only talk to those we know; we can withdraw into other worlds where peripheral thoughts wait to be clarified and decisions made; we can blame others if things do not go well; we can sit comfortably numb. As recipients of organised professional development, we too are powerful. Just like young people in classrooms, we can say, "I won't learn from you" (Kohl, 1994).

After a long drive, we meet on the balcony overlooking the vineyard and distant bushland. We stretch our bodies preferring not to be seated just yet. I watch as a

single falcon hovers patiently in the still air examining a slight movement below, preparing itself to dive. In this moment I feel the pang of alienation, of being alone and uncertain and wish that I'd stayed at home.

I have continued to ponder Korthagen's notion of core reflection just as I have continued to wonder about my experience at Warrenmang. Now, some months after our time there, I have read more closely about Korthagen and Vasalos's structured process of core reflection. My understandings have also developed by experimenting with core reflection with my students in the teacher education course I teach in and by examining my students' feedback. With another colleague I have also prepared and engaged in a presentation about this experience at the ATEA (Australian Teacher Education Association) National Conference in 2008. My professional learning develops as I continue to engage in conversations, read, write, reflect and take action. While I will come to focus briefly on what I did after the course, I aim to focus in more detail on what happened during those three days at Warrenmang, when I was participating in a professional development experience organised by two outside experts in their field. I focus on those first crucial experiences as a learner being introduced to a new approach, and I watch my responses closely. I aim to capture the lived story of my experience at Warrenmang and attend to my thinking and learning, capturing my uncertainties, frustrations and emotions as I try to stay open to new possibilities. I combine my descriptions and thoughts in the moment with a more analytical stance which occurs both during the experience and afterwards. I work within a climate that values measurement, sometimes above all else; where professional learning experiences are judged according to specified criteria and 'presenters' are labelled as either effective or not. And so I ask myself finally, was this an effective professional learning experience for me? And if it was, what made it so?

The intention of this three day course was to introduce teacher educators to the structured process of core reflection and build the competencies to use this process with pre-service teachers. Korthagen (2004) suggests that the course is about awareness-raising; taking reflection to a deeper level that encompasses recognising personal ideals and qualities, inhibiting beliefs and feelings (p. 92).

> In these courses, teacher educators are helped to focus more on the ideals of the people they work with, on their calling to the profession, and on their core qualities, but also on the limitations teachers themselves create, for example by negative thinking. The courses also aim at promoting the translation of people's core qualities into competencies and actual behaviour, and on overcoming their self-created inhibitions. (Korthagen, 2004, p. 92)

Reflection as a way of thinking and a strategy for learning is, according to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) "a key concept in teacher education" (p. 47). Day (1999) emphasises the importance of critical reflection to teachers' development and suggests that to be a 'reflective practitioner' "is synonymous with 'good' practice" (p. 26). Reflective practice grounds professional learning in the context of teachers' real work in the classroom which according to Rodgers (2002) is a "productive starting place for professional development" (p. 232). Schön (1983) contends that reflection can happen in the midst of action (reflection-in-action), as a teacher is working in the classroom with students and making decisions; or outside of an experience (reflection-on-action), which as Day (1999, p. 28) suggests also opens up opportunities to talk with others about teaching. Loughran (2006), referring to Schön (1983), contends that common to most interpretations of reflection are the notions of 'problem' and of 'framing and reframing'. Finding problems, Loughran (2006) suggests, is an important starting point for drawing attention to reflective processes. Framing and reframing are also important as they "have to do with coming to see a situation, being able to define it, to describe and account for its features, then to be able to view that situation from different perspectives" (Loughran, 2006, p. 96). Smyth (1992) warns against reflection becoming "a means of focusing upon ends determined by others" (p. 280) and suggests that reflective practices can lead to individualising problems and blaming teachers for "what's wrong with schooling" (p. 287). He argues for an approach that focuses on the broader social, political and cultural context which sees teachers confronting influential forces beyond the classroom and reconstructing their perceptions and practice based on new, informed understandings. Van Manen (1990) suggests that reflection allows us to "grasp the essential meaning" of a phenomenon (p. 77). It involves having direct contact with an experience and analysing its "structural or thematic aspects" (van Manen,

1990, p. 78). Van Manen warns against reducing complex phenomena to single definitions or simple concepts: "The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one-dimensional. Meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). While there are varied views about what should be focused on through reflective practice and the sorts of questions and frameworks that can be used to steer thinking in particular directions; most would probably agree with Dewey (1933) that "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads" (p. 6) is crucial thinking for teachers who must not "accept suggestions at their face value" (Dewey, 1933, p. 13).

When we pause to closely observe and describe teaching and learning experiences we are likely to be struck by the level of richness, complexity and mystery (van Manen, 1990) that surround them. The meaning-full, multi-dimensional nature of our educational work makes our experience difficult to penetrate. Reflective thinking can be a powerful means of recognising and appreciating uncertainty and ambiguity, searching for what lays hidden, making interesting connections, raising awareness and developing deeper understandings. For some, however, making meaning is a first crucial step; taking strategic action based on identifying key findings is what embeds new understandings, creates positive change and leads to ongoing professional inquiries. Rodgers' (2002) Reflective Cycle, as an example, aims to not only illuminate practice but also create transformative growth for teachers and enhanced learning for students. The four phases of her cycle which grows out of Dewey's (1933) concept of reflection are briefly outlined here:

> Reflection keeps at bay this tendency to interpret and react to events by first slowing down to see, then describing and analysing what happened, and finally strategising steps for intelligent action that, once carried out, become the next experience and fodder for the next round of reflection (Rodgers, 2002, p. 230).

Rodgers' (2002) approach aims to "slow down teachers' thinking so that they can attend to what is rather than what they wish were so" (p. 231). It is dependent on

community and diverse views being expressed (Dewey, 1938) including gaining feedback from students (Rodgers, 2002, p. 233). Rodgers' (2002) Reflective Cycle identifies four phases that the learner can move backward and forward through. The first phase is 'presence in experience', learning how to attend to experience and become more aware of what is happening through close observation. The second phase 'description' is the "process of telling the story of an experience" (p. 237) and of telling the experience from different perspectives. Rodgers (2002) suggests that when teachers describe their experiences, they should avoid interpretation and "postpone their urge to fix the problems embedded therein until they can "mess about" with the details of the stories" (p. 238). Learning to describe and differentiate, Rodgers (2002) insists, is an important skill to develop and enables the teacher to focus on moments and "paint pictures with nuance, detail and tone" (p. 244). The third phase is 'analysis of experience' which involves generating a range of diverse explanations about what is occurring, posing rigorous questions, examining assumptions and developing and making connections to theories. The fourth phase is 'experimentation' which is about "learning to take intelligent action" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 249). This is moving beyond the conceptual understandings to experimenting with what is learned in forthcoming experiences.

Smyth (1992) proposes a similar set of 'moments' linked to key questions:

> 1) Describe – what do I do? 2) Inform – what does this mean? 3) Confront – how did I come to be like this? and 4) Reconstruct – how might I do things differently (p. 295)?

The focus, for Smyth (1992) is more explicitly on engaging teachers "in untangling the complex web of ideologies that surround them in their teaching" (p. 295); whereas for Rodgers (2002) the focus is on teachers closely attending to students' learning. For Korthagen and Vasalos, in their use of core reflection, the focus is on understanding professional situations through an examination of one's personal behaviour, skills and beliefs. While the importance of self awareness and presence in experience are important elements in each of these models, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) insist that 'deeper' levels of reflection are achieved when one develops a *growth competence*, a capacity to examine one's

own thinking, feelings, desires and actions. The focus on self rather than context is what distinguishes this model from others.

A dialogical exploration

While at Warrenmang, I wrote in a journal during workshops and each night when I went to my room. I use my journal entries to construct the parts written in italics that are in the present tense. Here I give attention to my competing thoughts, my "inner vision" as well as the "outer reality" (Bruner, 1986, p. 21). These parts are written in the form of an internally persuasive dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) through which I try to express, evoke and examine my shifting feelings, thoughts and experiences. They also serve to create narrative connections between disparate moments. As both writer and researcher, I juxtapose significant, contextual moments or 'slices' (Green, 2002) that are partial, yet together suggest powerful connections. This writing is set alongside segments of distant, authoritative dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) where I use the more formal language of the academy to explain and examine in less personal ways, key concepts and research. My autobiographical narrative draws attention to multivoicedness (Bakhtin, 1981; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005): to the dynamic interplay between authoritative, external voices; personal "feeling voices" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005, p. 19); and voices shaped socially through interpersonal relationships. I also include the voices of others but only as they link to and influence my own subjective experience. What I hear and see, what I dismiss and ignore are revealing aspects in how I describe, interpret and express my lived experience. I understand that "every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting, meanings and interpretations" (Denzin, 1989, p. 25) and use my subjectivity as a portal to examining the complex interplay of factors that impact on thinking and learning. As Ellis and Flaherty (1992) suggest, "one's sense of self is conditioned by the peculiarities of time, place, and activity" (p. 9). Our subjectivities are influenced by physical, political and historical contexts and by the interweaving of the cognitive and emotional (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). Autobiographical writing enables me to highlight the connections between the personal and the structural; between my individual history and experience and theoretical ideas; between public and private worlds

(Boud & Miller, 1996). Autobiography, suggests Freeman (2007), opens "the way toward a more integrated, adequate, and humane vision for studying the human realm" (p. 120). Writing acts as an 'animator' (Boud & Miller, 1996, p. 7); it fosters learning by activating thoughts, illuminating subjectivities, enabling connections, inspiring new possibilities. Writing in narrative form as well as autobiographically, enables me to attend to my thoughts and responses and make links to broader theoretical frameworks. Telling personal stories, Ellis and Flaherty (1992) suggest is a "social process for making lived experience understandable and meaningful" (p. 80). Working within the three dimensional narrative space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49) and the directions this allows me to travel (*inward, outward, backward, forward,* and *situated within place*), I draw attention to the tensions and frustrations created in professional learning experiences that are meaning-full.

When writing notes in my journal at Warrenmang without a wider audience in mind, I found myself using the inclusive pronoun 'we' rather than 'I'; I intuitively wrote from a group perspective rather than an individual one. For me there was a strong sense of the participant group being 'whole' as well as a division between 'us' and the presenters, but this may not have been so for everyone. Many participants felt deep and unsettling emotions during this experience, and while there were diverse reasons for this based on the unique histories each person brings to an experience, participants were drawn together through shared frustration and the deep tensions they felt. I have decided to continue to use 'we' rather than 'I' in the internal dialogue I have reconstructed for this text because it emphasises the notion that this seemed to be a shared experience that developed in the complicated ways it did because of the relational interconnections between people. We noticed one another, empathised with one another, shared our concerns in private moments and were influenced by other's responses. In my intent to conduct research that is valid, fair and attentive to the relationships between people, I have invited a number of participants from both universities to read my subjective accounts in order to check my responses against their own and have inquired as to whether they can recognise themselves (Raider-Roth, 2005) at this time, in this context; is their voice represented here too? In response one participant wrote, *I find your writing style fascinating to*

read as you can interweave the experience, the emotion and the recollections with clarity and vividness. So much so, that I was back there being reminded (painfully at times) about the seminar and the raw emotions we all had. Another participant responded: *I have loved reading your chapter - brought back many memories. Such a thoughtful and considered discussion and quite fascinating. I thought your work a wonderful record and analysis of professional learning complexities. As well as the ongoing, and sometimes unexpected, resonances.* In an email response, Fred Korthagen wrote: *What I admire in your paper is the extensive explicitness about your assumptions, scholarly beliefs and cultural habits, and how these worked out for you during the workshop. At a general level, I think I already developed an increasing understanding of the underlying processes during the days at Warrenmang, but what you offer is amazing in terms of preciseness and openness regarding your individual experiences, and I admire the qualities of vulnerability and courage that shine through. Exquisit!*

Attending to prior learning and 'personal interpretive frameworks' (in a small way)

I begin with some narrative threads back into my own history that I reconstruct in order to better understand my personal experience at Warrenmang. Our professional learning experiences are never contained, isolated events even though they are often planned that way. To any professional learning experience, teachers bring what Kelchtermans (2004) calls a 'personal interpretive framework', the "set of cognitions, of mental representations that operates as a lens through which teachers look at their job, give meaning to it and act in it" (p. 220). This framework, according to Kelchtermans (2004) is made up of two domains, the professional self which refers to a teacher's conceptions of themselves as a teacher and learner and the teacher's subjective theory which is their personal system of knowledge and beliefs (p. 220-221). Professional learning takes place in the context of a life history. It is also situated, contextualised and influenced by particular 'working conditions' (Kelchtermans, 2004, p. 221) and social interactions. A narrative autobiographical approach to learning, such as the one I am taking here, can help teachers to reflect upon and

give ‘voice’ to their interconnected experiences (Elbaz, 1990). It can also help teachers to examine their ‘personal interpretive frameworks’ and engage them in an ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing professional identities and subjective theories (Kelchtermans, 2004, p. 224). In the account that follows I attempt to pick up some of the threads leading to my prior knowledge of Korthagen’s work and to show the relational and rhizome-like nature of my personal learning about the role of reflection within teacher education.

In my first week as a teacher educator I was given two photocopied chapters of Korthagen et al.’s book *Linking practice and theory: The pedagogy of realistic teacher education* (2001) to read. The first chapter written by Korthagen and titled: ‘Teacher education: a problematic enterprise’ was the first text I read about pedagogy within teacher education. I had worked for many years as a teacher in secondary schools and while I had deeply considered my own pedagogical approaches, I had spent very little time thinking about teaching from the perspective of a teacher educator. Korthagen paints a grim picture of how teacher education is perceived by teachers and the broader community and emphasises the difficult position teacher educators find themselves in. Korthagen (2001) insists that there are few “pedagogical models that show them alternative ways of educating teachers” (p. 8); that “the conditions under which they have to work are generally not very supportive of a change in old habits” (p. 8); and finally “in most places, there is no culture in which it is common for teacher education staff to collaboratively work on the question of how to improve the pedagogy of teacher education” (p. 8). The authoritative voices within this text certainly worked to influence my developing theoretical ideas about teacher education and had me thinking critically about the role that I could play as a teacher educator. My own very positive experience as a pre-service teacher further enhanced my appreciation of Korthagen’s concerns about traditional approaches to teacher education.

The Diploma of Education course I completed at La Trobe University in Melbourne in 1983 under the leadership of Professor Bernie Neville was in stark contrast to the traditional technical-rationality paradigm that Korthagen (2001) criticises. The traditional model sees teacher education as ‘training’: where the

university provides theory, methods and skills that are then practised in school settings. While this model of teacher education also existed at La Trobe University, students could select a philosophical stream that best suited them. The stream I selected focused on using action methods and drama to represent, analyse and reflect on problematic experiences in educational settings. In the stream I selected there were no lectures; there was no artificial division between theory and practice. In line with Korthagen's views about teacher education, we started with personal experience, problematised that experience by finding ways to stand outside of it and worked toward developing understanding and considering alternatives through conversation. Not only did this approach teach me to gaze critically at the construct of schooling; it enhanced my capacity to emotionally identify with young people and to use reflective thinking to develop self awareness. I distinctly remember a major assessment task that involved us working within a community based learning program over the course of the year. I chose to work with a group of migrant women who were participating in a creative writing course at their local community neighbourhood centre. There I learned about the empowering qualities of narrative and observed women who were largely disconnected in their communities, find personal voice through writing and sharing their stories publicly. As pre-service teachers our main assessment task was to develop a dramatic representation of what we had learned through our individual experiences. I remember how wonderful it was to have the performance I devised be taken by the women in the writing group to a conference in Canberra. I was certainly developing my own personal theories about learning and writing through this experience and these ideas had a direct impact on how I taught English and Drama as subjects in secondary schools and how I saw my role as a teacher. It was the opportunity to observe learning occurring at close quarters, to connect to real peoples' stories, to explore in open territory, to critically consider the role I could play in helping others to learn, and then to represent my understandings creatively that enabled deep learning to occur. These experiences formed a solid platform from which I could launch myself as a teacher and eventually as a teacher educator. Reading Korthagen in that first week was a powerful reminder that alternative approaches to traditional teacher education that link theory and practice in authentic ways are important.

The second chapter I was given to read in that first week of being a teacher educator was 'Learning from practice' written by Korthagen and Wubbels (2001). This chapter introduced me to the ALACT model which outlines five phases to enable pre-service teachers to reflect on experience: action, looking back on the action, awareness of essential aspects, creating alternative methods of action and trial (Korthagen & Wubbels, 2001, p. 45). I found the model useful as a framework for prompting questions and making things explicit, although I never used it in a systematic, ongoing way to encourage reflection. I took from Korthagen and Wubbels' work ideas about the significant role our internal needs, values and concerns play in teaching and learning interactions, however, the focus in my teaching came to be on using reflection to build understandings of how we learn, and particularly on teachers understanding their students as learners and the complex contextualised situations they learn within. I came to feel uneasy about Korthagen and Wubbels' (2001) notion of teachers' learning being spiral-like. They suggests that "each cycle of the spiral should be connected to previous cycles: only then is a process of continuous professional development being created" (Korthagen & Wubbels, 2001, p. 76). I understood my own professional learning to be less streamlined than this, more complicated and at times haphazard and unpredictable. Aside from some concerns, Korthagen's work had been influential in my development as a teacher educator and I looked forward to meeting him personally and learning more about his research.

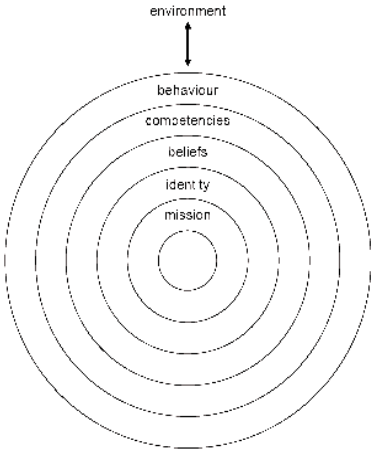
Peeling away the layers

We arrive at Warrenmang for an early dinner so that we can begin an evening session that will prepare us for the two intensive days ahead. I am sitting in the restaurant at a large round table with others and Fred and Angelo are seated opposite. The décor of the restaurant is largely brown with exposed timber and brown bricks dominating the interior. While the summer light is still strong outside, here in this corner of the restaurant, it is dark and enclosed. Hearing Fred and Angelo's Dutch accents takes me back fifteen years to when my husband and I lived in the Netherlands for a year. It was a time full of adventure, of learning about different cultures and finding new parts to ourselves. It was

also a time of developing close associations with family and new friends and I am transported back to fond memories through the sound of their language. In my mind's eye it is Christmas and I am mesmerised by the soft candlelight in story book window panes. I am walking beside a frozen canal on Christmas Day aware of myself on the other side of the earth because it is so bitterly cold and dark. I feel alive in this new iciness as though I am meeting the world for the first time. I have a strong desire to connect to these two: to talk to them about a place we both know. I am reminded now as I write, of visiting a teacher education class in America run by Carole Rodgers at the State University of New York in Albany. There was a student who stayed behind after the session to talk to me. He had worked for a year teaching in the seaside town of Apollo Bay in Australia, a place I know well and which is reasonably close to where I live. He saw me as an opportunity to resurface those important memories. We talked excitedly about the town, the teachers and students he worked with and how much he missed them. We ended up travelling back to the city of Albany together and his stories about America and his teaching stay with me.

I mention across the table that I lived in Delft and that my husband's uncle worked at the Rotterdam Academy of Fine Art. Fred moves to a vacant chair next to mine so that we can talk more easily. There is a moment when we connect through a familiar association with place but then suddenly the conversation becomes awkward. Perhaps there's something in my poor pronunciation of Dutch names that slows everything down and Fred becomes preoccupied with the time. We are due to begin the workshop in half an hour and the food still hasn't arrived. He glances anxiously at his watch, moves back to his seat, and speaks quietly to Angelo in Dutch.

In Korthagen's recent work, he uses an 'onion model' (Korthagen, 2004, p. 79) to describe the "various levels in people that can be influenced" (p. 79-80). The outer layers (see diagram over page), the *environment* and peoples' *behaviour*, can be observed by others. The environment might be the school context or the classroom setting and behaviours include what teachers and students do there. Korthagen (2004) believes that these levels gain the most attention because they can be more easily observed, judged, measured and influenced. The next layer



and moving in toward the centre of the onion is *competencies*. Korthagen (2004), drawing upon the work of Stoof, Martens and Van Merrienboer (2000) suggests that competencies are generally conceived of as "an integrated body of knowledge, skills and attitudes. As such, they represent a potential for behaviour, but not the behaviour itself" (p. 80). It will depend on the circumstances in a situation as to whether the competencies influence behaviour or not (Caprara & Cervone, 2003). According to Korthagen (2004) these outer levels influence and are influenced by three inner levels: *beliefs, identity* and *mission*, with mission being at the centre of the 'onion'. The beliefs a teacher holds, which can be influenced by their own schooling as well as cultural perceptions of schooling, will, Korthagen (2004) suggests, be a powerful influence on teaching and learning behaviours. How one defines oneself professionally, our self-concept, is the next layer called *identity*. Drawing from research (Bergner & Holmes, 2000; Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994), Korthagen suggests that our identity is developed through such aspects as character traits, personal values, social roles, interests, physical characteristics and personal history (Korthagen, 2004, p. 83). Korthagen (2004) argues that our self-concept is "largely determined by how we see our relationships with significant others" (p. 84). He suggests that teacher educators have for some years now, emphasised the importance of reflecting on professional identity so that pre-service teachers become more explicitly aware of the factors that influence what they do and say as teachers. Self understanding and a more biographical perspective, he contends, enables teachers to "make choices that are more conscious" (p. 85). The final inner layer is titled *mission*. This level of mission is similar, Korthagen (2004) suggests, to spirituality: "it is about becoming aware of the meaning of one's own existence within a larger whole, and the role we see for ourselves in relation to our fellow man" (p. 85). These are deeply felt personal values that are tied to a person's sense of why they are here and how they should act.

Korthagen and Vasalos spoke about the onion model at Warrenmang. Vasalos drew the model quickly on a sheet of butcher's paper, a pool of circles each becoming smaller. I scribbled it into my notebook and next to it his words: "Education creates a split between the 'role' and the human being".

After dinner we enter the conference room where the seats are arranged in a large U shape around the periphery of the room. Fred and Angelo sit at the front with a lap top computer between them. Behind them are a screen and a whiteboard. They have been waiting for us. We have probably taken too long with our meal. We take a seat and are suddenly silent.

The artefacts of the 'classroom' are "active components" (McGregor, 2004, p. 349) in the way social relationships are configured. People, objects and technologies interrelate within a given context so that what is possible is developed through that interaction. McGregor suggests that there is "dynamic tension between the social and material" and that this "then becomes an important theoretical tool for explaining relations and patterns of power and agency" (p. 351).

The construction of this space prepares us mentally and positions us in ways we are not necessarily conscious of. Routines of thought and practice are already set in motion. The technology is not for us to use; it is for them to represent considered notions. We sit without tables in a U shape that suggests that conversation will be expected. Some of us feel confronted by the way our bodies are visible to others. We face one another, we sit next to one another and we see, hear and feel one another's responses: a tightness of breath, the crossing of arms, the narrowing of foreheads, the tapping of pens. Separateness is so obviously felt at the beginning of any meeting where most people are strangers, but here we are further divided by our given roles as participants and presenters. Despite this awkwardness, without suggestion people make an effort to sit with colleagues from the other university. We know from experience that people end up finding a home, gravitating back to the same chair they sat in during previous sessions so that before you know it, you have fixed locations, fixed perspectives. We are after

all educators, and aware that while we might naturally gravitate to those we know well and to spaces we feel comfortable in, it is in our best interest to get to know strangers.

"What brought you here?" asks Fred; and, "What is the one thing you would do to change education?"

After some time for thinking, we begin, one by one to share our ideals. I say: "I would like to open education up to more imaginative possibilities." I notice that most people come from a critical cultural perspective in identifying what they would like to change. Our beliefs are articulated early and already we begin to categorise one another; to make assumptions. One of my colleagues who has a background in History and Sociology rather than education, says that she would alleviate poverty and class divisions in education. She later tells me that on expressing her view and hearing that others had different priorities, she felt alienated, as though her perspective didn't 'fit' with the general sentiment in the room. Fred and Angelo do not share their beliefs, instead they ask us to notice one another's personal strengths, to identify the core qualities within people. Angelo talks about the caring nature of one person, how another is honest, another likes clarity. When these comments are made, we cringe. We're not used to public affirmations; for our conceptual thoughts to be sidetracked by comments related to personal qualities rather than to ideas. It is early in the piece and we are suspicious and on guard. I can see one of my colleagues on the other side of the room moving uneasily in her chair. She is physically uncomfortable and irritated. She tells me later that she could feel her stress levels rising as she watched others feeling vulnerable. She saw the questioning as insensitive probing and there was no space made for debriefing. "You can't peel an onion and leave it raw," she says. Two of my colleagues leave after the first night unable to contend with the physical and emotional discomfort they are experiencing.

Fred and Angelo talk about Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) concept of flow. They talk about the need when problem solving for learners to be open minded, open hearted and mindful; that they should aim to be present in the moment and then

flow will occur. They will be in touch with their personal strengths and thinking will be more effective. They equate bright eyes with flow. "Why is it", says Angelo, "that when I tell you that you are caring, your eyes are bright and shiny? You are in flow."

No, I say to myself. Flow is not a flirtatious moment, a passing connection. I move uneasily in my chair because we have different understandings of the same concept. We seem to disagree. For me flow is a state of deep engagement and thinking. A complex and exciting state where skill, knowledge, emotion, self belief, strategic problem solving, curiosity interact together. Yes it's about being absolutely present in the moment but the moment is sustained through complex interconnections between the cognitive, the social and the emotional. It is purposeful and all encompassing, linked to personal achievement and fulfillment. Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) concept of flow has helped me to discuss and define deep learning with secondary students and pre-service teachers and has enabled me to understand my own passion for engaging in particular activities. Over time I have constructed my own sense of this concept that is deeply felt and understood. When someone else offers another way of thinking, my first reaction is to egotistically hold more firmly to my own. Doing this enables me to feel sure and worthy. I sit quietly with my thoughts. There is no discussion. I am beginning to doubt Fred and Angelo, to feel as though I am resisting.

As I sit in the U-shape on that first evening, I am aware of my unease. I try to understand where this feeling is coming from. Why can't I be completely open, patient and willing? Instead I feel skeptical. I am wary and judgmental. I feel as though Fred and Angelo are trying to sell me a product. They have come here with an approach that has been used elsewhere; a package that has clear components, a name and associated routine; a model they have personally developed. They position themselves as salesmen. Their role is to persuade us that this approach has value. We position ourselves as critical consumers. Buy it, they seem to be suggesting. As critical thinkers, trained to interrogate and question, we fit comfortably into a role we know well. We don't easily open our pockets. We look for flaws. We look for what we can personally use. We look

for quality and value, for integrity. We need to be convinced and they need to persuade. Are these roles limiting or unavoidable?

On the first night we are asked to think about a situation where we had concerns about the behaviour of one of our pre-service teachers. We are asked to consider why we think they behaved in the way they did. We share our stories with others and then in pairs. One person becomes a 'coach' who poses questions so that the other can explain and analyse the experience as well as their response. The focus for the coach is on looking for core qualities in the other and articulating what these qualities are. We are also encouraged, through our questioning, to help our partner recognise their personal ideals. When I play the role of coach I try to listen carefully to my partner's story and read beneath the surface of what happened to recognise feelings and values. This process makes me focus on the person and the event becomes secondary. I see in my partner a belief in equity. I can see that she feels empathy and has a desire to work toward just solutions. I work hard to focus on my partner and her qualities rather than on associations that emerge through ideas. My partner talks about an indigenous student she once taught who believed the institution was operating in racist ways. The student would hold up her arm in a motion of defiance in the classroom. On her arm was a map of Australia. This visual image of a strong arm had a clear impact on my partner. As 'coach' I focus my thinking on my partner's values and emotions. I ask myself, what is being revealed through this story about my partner? In order to focus my thinking in this way, I suppress other thoughts that emerge. This is not meant to be about political and cultural tensions in the classroom; instead I must focus on what is revealed about my partner within this context. I struggle to keep my mind focused in this way. My partner's story about her student's defiant arm, takes me back to my first year of teaching. I am supervising a school-wide detention at the end of the day. As a teacher in this school, this is one of my responsibilities and not one I feel comfortable about. The students sit quietly in rows and I am seated at a desk on a platform at the front of the room. A girl I have not seen before sits in the front row. She looks at me intently and begins to use her pen to cut her arm. She scrapes away drawing little bubbles of blood and she stares at me boldly waiting for a reaction. I am young and nervous but decide not to do anything, at least not here in this room. I

want to look at her, to meet her gaze, but force myself to focus intently on the book in front of me. I do not remember her face, but her arm and how she used her arm to gain attention and to unsettle my certainty, stays with me forever. While listening to my partner, I am aware of this memory emerging, she has triggered it, and for a brief moment I see clearly in my mind two arms being held up: one pale, scratched and bloody and the other a strong, black defiant arm solid against racism. I quickly squash these images that work to distract me. This is not about people using their bodies in desperate attempts to be heard; this is about my partner's inner qualities. When I lie in bed that night, I surface the images of the arms. I make them more visible in my mind and reflect on their significance as powerful symbols that draw attention to the political and social elements of schooling. If I had not been in the role of 'coach' and feeling the responsibility of keeping on track that comes with this role, I would have shared my story too. This would have created a different sort of connection and conversation between my partner and me, perhaps one based on shared experience and the shared exploration of ideas worth examining. I feel as though I have missed an opportunity.

I think that night about my own subjectivities; and the subjectivity of the 'coach'. In my partner's story I see her empathy, but another person might see anger. Is anger a core quality? I am encouraged to validate my partner's quality by placing a value on it: "This is an excellent quality of yours," I say. Why do I feel insincere when I say this?

As I sit in the U shape during the second day of the workshop I feel little personal connection to Fred or Angelo. I know very little about their personal and professional lives and they know little about mine. When we break for morning tea or lunch, Fred and Angelo huddle together and talk seriously in Dutch. We assume they are talking about us. We cluster together in increasingly mixed groups and talk about them. People are feeling anxious, angry and frustrated. Some have no idea where we're heading and what the point is. Others feel personally confronted. Many feel that our Dutch presenters are rude. How dare they probe us when they share so little of themselves? Our negativity draws us closer together and gives strangers something to share.

Korthagen (2004) insists that in education we often start from a deficiency model. He suggests that a focus on character strengths and positive personal qualities prepares us better for learning and change. For teacher educators and for teachers more generally, the focus, he believes should be on facilitating a process whereby the inner levels of beliefs, identity and mission influence the outer levels of behaviour (p. 87). When there is a balance between the layers, a 'coherent whole', teachers can be more effective.

Korthagen and Vasalos (2005, p. 54) suggest two questions that can work to create new possibilities and learning for those who reflect on their experiences. We should ask:

1. What is my ideal situation?
2. What are the limiting factors preventing the achievement of that ideal?

These questions are closely linked to the inner layers of the core: identity and mission. They enable a teacher to understand what they really want to achieve and that what might be standing in the way could be their own limiting behaviours. I ask myself, what is my ideal in this learning experience? What do I really want to gain from it? Given the way that this professional learning program has been framed, my ideal is to come away with a deeper understanding of what reflection is and how it can work to enhance learning. I also want to enhance the skills I use in my work with developing teachers. Because I know that I learn well when I am in a state of flow, my ideal is to experience what Csikszentmihalyi (1992, p. 74) would say is a sense of discovery as well as a creative feeling of being transported into a new reality. Flow activities, Csikszentmihalyi (1992) suggests are "enjoyable experiences" (p. 72) because they are demanding. They require us to challenge ourselves and stretch our capacities. These optimal experiences, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1992) are what make us happy. In optimal experiences we act intentionally, participate consciously, attend fully and respond physically, emotionally and cognitively.

> Contrary to what we usually believe, … the best moments in our lives, are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times – although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if

> we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995, p. 3).

If my ideal situation is to engage in an optimal learning experience here at Warrenmang, is that occurring? The tension and frustration I feel are created because flow is disrupted. I feel uneasy about playing a role and needing to act according to set structures and routines. I feel the desire to explore and discover connections rather than be a 'coach' who operates within defined boundaries. I am annoyed that some people in the group dominate and that others are not given opportunities to speak. I am suspicious of this very personal and serious focus on positive qualities that seems to ignore the value that other forces like resistance and play and humour can contribute. I am confused by the way the experience is structured in that we are drip fed little bits of information and not given opportunities to see the links. I am baffled by the way the presenters ignore the landscape at meal breaks. We are talking intellectually about human qualities and yet the real humanity within this experience, created through the interconnections between people and place are seemingly ignored.

I come to Korthagen and Vasalos's second question: What are the limiting factors that are preventing me from achieving my ideal? In other words, what limiting behaviours, feelings, images and beliefs are restraining me? This question helps me to be aware that I have a choice as to whether I will allow these limiting factors to influence my behaviour or not (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 55). I can either be restricted and resistant or through awareness, be empowered to act and think differently. So, what factors are limiting me? My image of Korthagen and Vasalos as salesmen, separate to us and foreign, limits my capacity to connect. The tension I feel in my body as I sense others around me also feeling tense and hurt warps my capacity to think clearly. When I think that a concept they discuss does not fit easily with what I currently know and believe I become dismissive. When I talk negatively to others at meal times it intensifies my frustration but also my intrigue. When opportunities for me to be personally 'known' are overlooked, I feel alienated. I come to see that my tumultuous feelings are a valid and interesting part of this experience.

On the second day I wake early and meet two colleagues for a walk before breakfast. We walk to the top of a hill and look out over the scrub and then decide to follow a disused fire track. As we walk we talk about our work in two different universities. We talk about the collegial support other women have provided in times when we have had to prove our capabilities in male dominated universities. As we walk further into the bush, our conversation takes more personal turns and a colleague who I have just met shares a difficult personal story about her husband leaving her and how she is caring for her aging father. I think about the ease women have to share their stories with other women and how it seems so natural to be talking like this on this dusty track in the middle of nowhere. I marvel at my colleague's amazing optimism and the strength and humour she exhibits in the face of these difficult situations. I suddenly realise that I have no idea where we are. I am completely disorientated and unsure whether we are heading away from the conference facility or toward it. I panic for a moment believing we are lost. We decide to have faith in our intuition and to keep walking in the direction our feet are taking us. Eventually we notice a familiar track – the road we came in on. We have walked an awkward circle.

Back in the conference room the core reflection model is placed before us on the floor. The terms 'ideal', 'core quality', 'obstacle' and 'problem / situation' are written on separate laminated cards. They become stepping stones for us as we gain an awareness of how these concepts can be used as triggers in a conversation between the coach and the person reflecting. Fred and Angelo hand out a set of these cards to each group of two. The idea is to put the cards on the floor or the table and to use them to prompt and track the conversation. We are asked to start with a problem situation. The coach poses questions related to thinking, feeling and wanting in order to gain emotional contact with the problem and to help the person reflecting feel they are being understood. We are asked to then move to the 'ideal': what would the person reflecting like to see happen, what is their ideal in this situation? We then move to questions about obstacles: what stands in the way of the ideal being achieved? We are asked to focus on internal rather than external obstacles; our own behaviours or inhibitions that stand in the way of us achieving what we want. Through this talk,

the coach recognises and articulates the core qualities of the person and focuses the discussion on the feelings surrounding and impacting on the problem. This creates 'contact' between the two people, a feeling of empathy that Fred and Angelo say is important.

We are sent off (with our cards) to find some space and try the approach with our real life problems. My first thought, before I even think about finding a partner, is to disband with the cards. They seem artificial and game-like. I am eager to get into a real, contextualized conversation and I have an idea that the cards will get in the way. A colleague from the other university, who I have spoken with at morning tea, catches my eye and we decide to become partners. We are strangers but there is something we clearly like about one another – a connection has been made although its nature not clearly understood. My partner is eager to use the cards and to physically walk through the stages of the model and while I feel resistant; I don't say so and decide to be open minded. We find a corner of the room and place the cards on the floor. We begin by placing our bodies on the 'Problem / situation' card and as coach I ask my partner to explain her problem, posing questions about her thoughts, feelings and wants. As we talk we visualize her responses as an elevator taking us up to the 'ideal' card. We position ourselves there as she explains what she would like to see happen in this situation. She begins to identify obstacles that are preventing her from achieving what she wants. I am impressed at how she reflects honestly on her own feelings, even her laziness and how she sees these responses as limiting what she can achieve. As coach I listen carefully and recognise the qualities within my partner. I stand on the 'core quality' card and acknowledge what I see. I truly admire my partner and feel proud of her – she has talked honestly about herself and is taking the process seriously. As the problem unfolds we begin to move through the layers again in order to discuss new and emerging problems, new feelings, other obstacles, and so on. We have made a real connection through this conversation. I feel very much at ease with this person I have just met.

When we come back to reflect on the process as a whole group, we discover that we were the only ones who used the cards on the floor and that most groups did not use them at all. Through our positive experience I became more open to the

concepts and had directly experienced their value. I was also left thinking about the interesting connection between our thinking and our physical movements. Walking through the stages enabled us to be more explicit and intentional, and also more reflective and metacognitive. We were able, along the way, to track and re-track our thinking and talk explicitly about it. If I had held onto my first resistant thought, then I would not have experienced the process in this deeper, more meaningful way and I feel sure that my learning would have remained at a surface level. It is this positive experience with the process that prepares me for using it much later with my own students in the classroom.

At morning tea we are told that one of our colleagues has had to leave urgently. His mother-in-law, who has been ill, has been taken to hospital and doctors fear she will not live much longer. We drink our tea and look out over the still, dry landscape. For a long moment I hear only a fly buzzing annoyingly around my face.

After the break Angelo suggests he model the approach publicly and he calls for a volunteer who will share their problem. After a moment of silence, one of my colleagues, who is eager to assist, offers to take part. This male colleague has been an active contributor in discussions, so much so that some of the female participants have become frustrated by the way he is dominating in discussions. One of my colleagues talks afterwards about being angered by the dominance of male voices in a group that is comprised mainly of women. The male volunteer has contributed in discussion and has been invited a number of times to share his view. He sits at the front of the room in close proximity to Fred and Angelo who begin to call upon him and publicly acknowledge his presence more than others. There are some in the group who have not said anything in the whole group discussions. We are a group of nearly 30 and for many the arrangement of furniture and the sheer size of the group are not conducive to discussion. Along side this is the practice of interrupting that both Angelo and Fred engage in. Many of us are used to free flowing conversation where ideas bubble up and are built upon by others. We are used to a focus on ideas and of building clearer understandings of difficult concepts through talk. Here talk is used differently. The talk must focus on the qualities of the speaker and be cognisent of the

emotions that are being expressed. In order for Fred and Angelo to model this, they interrupt the flow of the conversation so that they can draw peoples' attention back to the inner qualities of the speakers. On a number of occasions, people who have eagerly and intuitively added to the conversation, have been ignored or interrupted mid-sentence. This has created increased tension for some individuals because they feel that some people are being focused on more than others and that certain ideas are not being valued. In private conversations, Fred and Angelo are accused of being rude and of excluding members of the group, particularly women.

This tension and frustration is increased when Angelo models the approach to the whole group. Angelo acts as coach and his partner who volunteered, begins to share his problem. The volunteer believes that some of the mature aged students in his course are working too hard and will be unable to sustain heavy workloads. As he shares his problem / situation, Angelo paces around the open space and poses questions. His partner stands firmly on the appropriate card as he responds. I have a strong feeling that the partner is being interrogated. I squirm in my seat and I am aware of the physical presence of the two people sitting either side of me. I can feel the brewing anger in one person as she sits rigidly in her chair and on the other side my colleague's fingers rub tensely against his temples and every now and again I hear a heavy sigh. I feel sorry for Angelo's volunteer partner who calming answers Angelo's probing questions. Angelo clearly has a plan and he directs his partner to discuss his emotions by sharing how he would feel if he were in this situation. I feel that Angelo is being judgmental; that the partner's responses aren't good enough for him. Angelo directs the conversation by suggesting "How would it be if you felt this instead?" He interrupts in order to refocus the discussion back onto feelings and the person's ideal. The questioning is forceful and pushy. I wonder later whether I am unfairly interpreting Angelo's probing tone and whether (knowing something about the clipped manner of speech that Dutch people use when they speak English), I have misunderstood his intentions. Through the focus on feelings rather than events, we become more aware of our own feelings as observers. In this moment it is difficult to unpack the tension and think about how it might be inhibiting other thoughts. Watching is excruciating.

We break for lunch and people are confused and concerned. When we return, Angelo's volunteer partner has reflected on the framing of his problem. He begins to see that the problem might not be a problem for the mature aged students and that in his desire to care for the students he is making assumptions based on his own coping mechanisms and behaviours. The problem is his own rather than perhaps their's. Having some time to reflect over lunch has enabled our colleague to see his problem and his own feelings about the problem more clearly. He also admits that becoming open minded about the problem enabled him to understand the situation more clearly and see creative possibilities for resolution. We are thankful that our colleague has come through this experience feeling positive, but we are soon reminded that not everyone is prepared to move on.

It is clear that Fred and Angelo are concerned about our responses just as we are about theirs. Fred is frustrated. We have not acknowledged his feelings. We have not recognised his core qualities – even though he has been recognizing some of ours. He also feels an absence of joy in the discussion.

"We can't see joy. We can't see it," he says adamantly to the group.

He wants real and meaningful contact to be made between people, particularly between himself and other members of the group.

"The problem," he insists, "is that I miss contact. I didn't feel contact when I shared a core quality."

He feels hurt. This is probably the first time in a professional learning experience that I have heard a presenter say such a thing. He feels ignored and believes that we don't care about his emotions. "Well why should we care about you, when you don't care about us?" people say. "You interrupt us. You make very little effort to get to know us." People feel insulted and confronted but interestingly, as Australians we also shrug the whole thing off by humourously referring to Fred and Angelo as 'wankers'. They have no idea what this term

means until, at dinner that night, after a glass or two of wine, someone explains. For us, all this talk about feelings, in a manner that seems contrived and insincere, is getting too much. We laugh at the situation and in our laughter the connections between us grow stronger.

I sit quietly in the U-shape listening to Fred say he is hurt because we have ignored his feelings. I am thinking about the hurt I experienced at breakfast that morning and am wondering whether I should share the experience publicly or not. I start to speak when I see an opening in the conversation but Fred continues to talk and I stop. I decide to try again. Yes, I think, this is relevant and worth sharing and so I persist.

At breakfast that morning I arrived late. Fred and Angelo were sitting at a large round table on their own and I decided to sit with them. I wanted to tell them something that I was quite excited about. I began by asking them how they had slept and whether they were disturbed by mosquitoes (as I was). Angelo had a small organiser or computer in his hand and he raised his eyes and smiled at me in between fiddling with the keypad. I told them that I was completing a doctorate with a focus on professional learning. They smiled and responded politely – "Mmmm."; "Ahh, yes." I told them that I wanted to write about this experience and that I had sat in bed the night before scribbling madly. They smiled again. They asked no questions and Angelo clearly had his mind elsewhere. Eventually, after an awkward silence, they politely left the table.

When I share my experience with the group, I suggest that this could have been an opportunity for Fred and Angelo to model their approach in an authentic context, to demonstrate its real value. I was left feeling ignored, thinking that these well known researchers didn't have time to care about early career researchers like myself. They weren't really interested in contact after all. What was an opportunity to model their beliefs in a real situation was lost. Like Fred I felt hurt. I poured myself a cup of coffee, shrugged off my disappointment and turned my attention to a colleague who had just sat at the table with his breakfast. He had taught in a school that I knew quite well and soon we were sharing stories about living and working in country Victoria. I left the table thinking

about the contrast between the two conversations and questioning Fred and Angelo's integrity.

Back in the conference room, I am aware of Angelo's gaze as I share this story and my feelings. I begin to feel awkward. Why should they care about me and my research? Does this incident say more about me and my desire to be heard than it does about them? Angelo agrees that he was distracted during our conversation and he apologizes. I can feel that he is really connecting to what I am saying and that his sentiments are genuine. He speaks about the qualities he sees within me – my honesty and my capacity to share my feelings. In that moment I feel acknowledged and that real contact is being made between us. It is a joyous feeling, one that even now, as I write, I feel silly expressing.

On the final day Angelo talks about mindfulness and being present in the moment. "There is only this moment," he says and he encourages us to sit in silence and feel the moment. When some of us share our experience of this, the tension starts to rise again. Someone compares this feeling of being in the moment to swimming, of losing sense of all else and being in the here and now. Angelo insists that when we make comparisons in this way, we are not fully present; we are taking our minds to other moments in time. We must try to believe that there is only this moment. Some of us feel that in responding in this way Angelo is discounting views that when considered have the potential to extend the conversation and the thinking. Angelo challenges us to stop thinking conceptually, to stop explaining, and to just be. We resist.

"There was a moment that I felt contact with you and I felt joy, then I feel you drifting away again and I feel sad and lonely," says Angelo.

"Is there anybody who understands me? I don't feel understood. I feel hopeless," says Fred. He admits to wanting to get on the plane and leave.

This pathetic blubbering about feeling hurt is getting on our nerves. Just get over it, we say. Move on. We don't care. They are asking us to acknowledge the emotions we feel in this moment, and we refuse.

"We're argumentative people,' someone says.

"We don't know anything about you. How can you expect us to care?" says another.

"I feel very uncomfortable in the large group," says someone else. "We're not used to talking in intimate ways in such a large group."

Are these our limiting beliefs?

Korthagen and Vasalos (2001), in a handout written for the core reflection course, suggest, "It is important insight that right at the very moment of frustration you can discover your own contact avoidance patterns" (p. 4). They suggest that feeling pain and frustration can allow learners to become more aware of what is standing in the way of developing deeper understandings; they can be the driving force for new learning and insight. It is in these moments we can ask ourselves questions like: What am I experiencing right now? What is my need and my ideal in this situation? Am I inhibiting myself in trying to reach that? How? What do I now realise? In these difficult moments we can, Korthagen and Vasalos (2001) suggest, become aware of our inhibiting patterns of behaviour. These they group into three types (Korthagen &Vasalos, 2001, p. 1-2): fight patterns (lashing out at others and blaming others as well as ourselves); flight patterns (giving up, walking away from situations, turning inward); and freeze patterns (downplaying feelings, disconnecting, hoping it will soon pass). Responding in these ways makes contact with people and new ideas difficult. I begin to wonder whether Korthagen and Vasalos are purposely creating frustration and anger so that they can demonstrate these responses. Maybe by telling us that they feel hurt and sad, they are encouraging us to see that fight/flight/freeze patterns of behaviour lead to a lack of personal contact between individuals. If this is intentional, they never tell us.

Toward the end of the final day, Fred and Angelo tell us something about their work in the Netherlands. We have been waiting to hear stories about their

working lives and now, at this late stage, they decide to tell us. Have they been withholding themselves intentionally? Why is it important for us to hear their stories? Fred tells us something about his family and his son who is twelve. A woman in the group says that she feels more connected with Fred now because she too has children around that age. Knowing something about him makes a difference to her. Prior to this, Fred's demeanor is almost wooden. He talks about concepts. He sits in his chair physically removed from us. He smiles politely but his mind appears to be elsewhere. When he says that he feels hurt by our responses; when he says that he feels no connection to us, we feel very little sympathy (in fact we listen cynically) because his feelings do not appear genuine and we have seen little real evidence of his humanness.

One of my colleagues, feeling that the tensions have finally been broken suggests that we engage in a group hug. She stands awkwardly in the centre of the space waiting for others to join her. After a moment's hesitation, some people do. I can see that she has taken a brave step and I join her out a need to reconnect with people and because I don't want her to feel embarrassed. Others remain seated not yet ready to trust this moment of spontaneous collegiality. The moment is awkward.

We return to the safety of our seats and watch film footage of Dutch teachers talking about their use of core reflection and how it has changed their practice. They talk positively about their teaching, students and school contexts. "This is a wonderful profession," says one of the Dutch teachers and I agree. Fred reminds us that core reflection can't be explained; that it must be experienced. He asks us to spend some quiet moments writing down what we have learned through this experience. I write:

- *The prompts to encourage core reflection are useful; they provide me with a language to enable an explicit process of feeling and thinking to occur.*
- *Space and opportunities should be provided for people to make personal connections and contact that is authentic and meaningful.*

- *Modeling of a range of behaviours is important for those who teach; this includes modeling tension, anger and anxiety that is authentic.*
- *I am reminded about how important it is to focus explicitly on the positive qualities of people and the relational.*
- *Professional learning experiences must be in touch with authentic emotions.*

Finally, we seem to relax as a group. While some of us are still confused about what has been achieved, others feel that this has been an interesting experience that deserves ongoing contemplation and discussion.

"There were small moments when I didn't think we'd make it," says Fred.

"I'm amazed that we're here in this state," says Angelo.

They seem to be expressing honest thoughts and so I ask for some honest feedback about us as a group of educators. Are there any cultural patterns they have observed about us as a group of Australian educators? Have we responded differently compared to educators in the Netherlands and America? Angelo says yes, we are different in some ways. He suggests that a core quality we have is a sense of relaxedness, a 'no worries' approach that is easy going, light-hearted and sometimes humorous. This limits us, he suggests from going deeper; from being able to face our problems and feelings and from showing that we have been touched. He also suggests that we entered into the experience feeling suspicious, fearful and judgmental; that we distrust authority. This is in contrast to groups of teachers from other countries who are perhaps more open minded and positive. His final comment about us as a group of Australian educators is that we are autonomous and want to do things our own way. We don't like to be told. Having worked with Australian teachers for many years in professional learning situations, I recognise these attitudes too, not only in others, but also in myself. No one argues with Angelo. We sit quietly and listen. Perhaps we are more aware of ourselves as learners and thinkers as a consequence of this experience; on that I can never be sure. I wonder whether anyone will use core reflection in

their work with pre-service teachers and whether our understandings of this process match Fred and Angelo's intentions.

Attending to 'Mother's bucket'

McCrary Sullivan (2000) insists that the issue of attention is crucial in education; that we need to learn to "attend with keen eyes and fine sensibilities" (p. 211). McCrary Sullivan writes in poetic form about her mother who worked as a biologist and taught her the value of close attention to detail. As a child McCrary Sullivan would go with her mother as she fossicked in rock pools collecting specimens to later examine. In her poem *Mother Collecting Marine Specimens* (2000, p. 213) she writes:

> When we reenter brightness
> And the ordinary pitch of traffic,
> I lean to look in Mother's bucket:
> Green stones, yellow trees,
> Purple stars, an orange flame.

I used my journal to collect traces; small moments that stand out in this professional learning experience because of their intensity. This is not a full account of our three days together. Nor will it be a true account for everyone who was there. It is a collection of moments that have sharp, clear edges for me; moments that because of their intensity urged me to write. Through the writing process I examine, relive, rethink, reframe and in that process I find new things to marvel at, question and admire. In the busy process of entering a new year with new students, I might easily have shelved away my experience at Warrenmang and not attended to it again. I was not obliged to do anything but simply have the experience. There were no expectations from those I work with that I relate these new ideas to practice. I had come away with a tool that I could either use with my students or not. I had come away with questions about Korthagen and Vasalos's ideas; more questions than clear answers, but there was no ongoing process in place to continue a conversation with others. I had come away intrigued by the way we as participants had responded, yet those emotions might

have faded quickly had I not written about our activities, my thoughts and peoples' comments in my journal and not had the idea to write about it in extended ways here. A central component of my professional learning is the writing I do to capture and reflect on my subjective experience. As Richardson (1994) suggests, "writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of "knowing" – a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 516). Writing enlivens me to the intricacies of what I experience and enables a continuing dialogue with self and others. My experience is the "primary text for reflection" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 232). Writing in both narrative and experimental ways enables me to pay close personal attention to experience and wonder; to examine experience from multiple perspectives; to toss ideas around; to reenter experience imaginatively and critically; and to see there my thoughts and how they are influenced by social processes and broader, cultural and political contexts.

Some time after returning from Warrenmang, I decided to use the core reflection process with my Graduate Diploma of Education students; first with a small group of volunteers and then with the whole group of fifty. The students identified a problem situation from their recent teaching experience and were prompted by a 'coaching' partner to discuss their thoughts, feelings and wants related to this situation. Through the conversation students articulated their ideal and their partner identified their core qualities and strengths. Students were prompted to consider obstacles: limiting thoughts and behaviours that were standing in the way of them achieving their ideal. I gave them cards with the key concepts labeled to place on the floor and to use as stepping stones and as guiding prompts as they talked. We discussed the role of the 'coaching' partner who needed to listen actively and phrase open and probing questions to prompt reflection. I added a prompt not included by Korthagen and Vasalos called 'New Possibilities' so that the conversations could be geared toward examining alternative actions, creative ideas and possibilities for change. I observed from a distance while the students talked and moved freely around the key conceptual prompts.

I was struck by the intensity of the students' interactions. It was later in the year and these students knew one another well and were used to engaging in thoughtful conversation, but I noticed through their body language, their eye contact and use of gesture, how intimately engaged they were. Their conversations were alive, warm and active. I met with a small group of 12 volunteers after they had used the process and these were some of the comments they made:

- "The conversation flowed in interesting, unpredictable ways. The placemats gave the conversation direction and clear areas to focus on. They helped me to frame questions."
- "The process enables you to build a bridge together. Seeing the coach as an ally makes it very positive."
- "It's difficult to name core values. I'm not used to looking for them and analysing behaviour in this way."
- "We're used to blaming external factors. This is a different sort of focus."
- "If you're honest, you're thinking deeply."
- "This is a multi-layered process – one thought leads into another. It helps you to recognise connections."
- "I like the process. It's not negative. It was very positive."
- "It enabled me to be more objective – it takes you outside of your problem."
- "The longer you talk about your situation the better. You actually peel away the layers."
- "What is my ideal? This made me think that I don't talk much about what I'd like to see happen. I just focus on the problem."
- "I liked reflecting without pen and paper. This was more honest and interactive."
- "You move with the emotional flow of the conversation. The physical movement actually helped create this flow. It was much better than sitting at a table. It sort of frees you up."

At Warrenmang our experience had been unsettling and difficult, but here with my students, the process of working with core reflection, or at least our understandings of it, was positive. I wondered why. In her work with the Reflective Cycle, Rodgers (2002) contends that "the formation of a community of respect among teachers is critical to creating an environment for successful reflection" (p. 233). Korthagen and Wubbels (2001) point to the importance of learners feeling safe: "an important prerequisite for learning from experience is a feeling of safety on the part of the student teacher" (p. 46). The students had worked closely together for a number of months and during that time had built trusting relationships. This enabled them to engage in exploratory, honest, positive and productive conversations about their experiences and their personal feelings and ideals. At Warrenmang I was struck by peoples' responses to their real life problems; by their strength in difficult private moments; by their openness and ability to share; and by their desire to persist and think hard about this difficult and challenging experience. There were moments in the workshops; however, where the relational and emotional elements seemed difficult, forced, artificial and contrived. There were also times when emergent thoughts about interesting concepts were interrupted, ignored or trivialized. The contradictions and tensions that existed within the experience made it *too* frustrating for some. Korthagen and Vasalos (2001) have argued that frustration is a motivator for learning (p. 5) and that core reflection can help learners to work through and understand difficult feelings. While they contend that frustration arises from inner obstacles and inhibitions and that attention needs to be given to personal needs and emotions (p. 1); I would argue that attention must also be given to external factors related to context, that the power of reflective thinking is that it allows us see and understand connections and disconnections between ourselves and others and enables us to probe into complex socio-cultural forces that impact on us profoundly in our professional lives.

Was the experience an effective professional learning experience for me? Yes. My learning was not reliant on what Korthagen and Vasalos did as presenters, but emerged through the balances and counterbalances created through many forces working together in both harmony and disjuncture; that continue to upset and satisfy me in ways I like.

Epilogue

This afternoon I picked up my twelve year old daughter from school.

I've finished reading through the whole doctorate, I said to her. *I feel exhausted*.

That's good mum, she said, as though it was just like any other day.

You know when you're learning well at school, I said, *what's it like?*

It's a bit like being in a maze most of the time. Sometimes I have no idea what's going on. Then you find your way out and you stand back and things make sense. You look back and you see this crazy picture and it's really quite great. Then suddenly you realise you're standing in another maze.

I like that, I said.

As I stand back now and look over this work, I see it as a maze of stories within stories, some that connect and build pathways to illumination; others that slide away into dead ends, perhaps frustratingly so. What have I learned about professional learning for those who teach? And what have I learned about writing as a method of inquiry?

I am more convinced of the empowering and engaging nature of learning that unfolds in surprising ways in real life contexts; that learning like this is neither systemized nor full of empty slogans. Professional learning experiences like the ones I have examined are lively exchanges between inner and outer voices that seek to understand complexity. These voices are turned on by those who attend to and enter the dark and murky spaces that are not easily navigated and understood. I have tried to show the wonderings in these spaces, to pose questions, to scrutinize, to describe feelings and to illuminate what is seen there when one stands still. These are frustrating spaces because they shift and are so open to interpretation. For the fine analytical mind, for the mind that needs a text

to boil down to something clear and precise, this work may be annoyingly hazy and inconclusive. I too am frustrated by my inability to come out at the end a clear winner, to see the light at the end of the dark maze and to celebrate with a startling, new message. Perhaps I am too lost in story, too open to seeing ongoing connections and too excited by just being there and capturing it in language that continues to move.

Composing these texts has helped me to understand the sort of educational research I want to engage in. I know that I come to life as a writer when I try to capture my teaching and learning experiences and the experiences of others in language that evokes and explores. I know that my research will not be heeded to by policy makers and that I will not easily be able to speak to large groups and distil a clear message about what matters; but I do know, inspired by educators like Maxine Greene, that I can help to fill a space that is largely void, and work with teachers to examine their personal practice, find rich connections, engage in conversations that animate and illuminate what is understood, and appreciate that inherently beauty lies in our unique, interwoven, incomplete stories.

I would like to return to Marden's painting 'Skull with Thought' (1993-95) because that is where I started, with a visual image of what I hoped to capture in words. I was keen like Marden to find a sensuous, emotional and relatively free space to capture multi-layered experiences as well as uncertainty, reflection, insight and experimentation. It might be considered brave to take on such a task, particularly within a field that is more attuned to critical, sharp edges and linear progressions. I am not brave. What I have found is that Marden's skull is in fact mine. This is the way my mind works. My thinking made visible. I have tried to emulate this mind at work, to insert myself as authentically as I can in order to show what deeper thinking and learning within my profession is like. When I move out of personal and imaginative spaces into more descriptive, logical and analytical writing that positions my work in educational contexts, I feel less committed because I am less able to work creatively with language. I know that this failure is inherent in the writing. Perhaps in revealing this, I am pointing to a broader issue relevant to many of those who teach, who are numbed by educational research, distant theoretical perspectives and debates that are not

inclusive; who long to be awakened by something emotive, playful and open; that demands that they take part and talk back. I feel as though my understandings about narrative research and its power to engage teachers and capture their unique experiences and responses have broadened through the process of writing. Writing takes me on that journey through the maze, allows me to smell the hedges, hear the soft sounds of distant pattering feet, and decide in which direction I will travel next.

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